

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

EDITED BY ALI RIAZ, ZOBAIDA NASREEN
AND FAHMIDA ZAMAN



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Political violence has remained an integral part of South Asian society for decades. The region has witnessed and continued to encounter violence for achieving political objectives from above and from below. Violence is perpetrated by the state, by non-state actors, and used by the citizens as a form of resistance. Ethnic insurgency, religion-inspired extremism, and ideology-driven hostility are examples of violent acts that have emerged as challenges to the states which have responded with violence in the form of civil war and through violations of human rights disregarding international norms.

This book explores various dimensions of political violence in South Asia, namely in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Each chapter either speaks to an important aspect of the political violence or provides an overall picture of the nature and scope of political violence in the respective country. Political violence is understood in the larger sense of political, that is, above and beyond institutions, and also as an integral part of social relationships where social norms and the role of individual agency play seminal roles. The contributions in this book incorporate both institutional and non-institutional dimensions of political violence.

Exploring how everyday life in South Asian states and societies is transformed by the engagement with violence through direct and indirect methods, this book adopts an interdisciplinary framework; diverse methods are employed – from ethnographic readings to more macro level analyses. The phenomenon is explored from historical, sociological, and political perspectives. This book will be useful as a supplementary text in courses on South Asian Studies in general and South Asian Politics in particular.

Ali Riaz is a Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Illinois State University, USA, where he served as the Chair of the Department of Politics and Government from 2007 to 2017. His publications include *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence* (2016) and the co-edited *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh* (2016).

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INTRODUCTION

Perspectives on political violence in South Asia

Ali Riaz, Fahmida Zaman, and Zobaida Nasreen

Political violence has remained an integral part of South Asian society for decades. The region has witnessed and continued to encounter violence for achieving political objectives from above and from below, that is, violence is perpetrated by the state, by non-state actors, and used by the citizens as a form of resistance. Ethnic insurgency, religion-inspired extremism, and ideology-driven hostility are examples of violent acts that have emerged as challenges to the states; on the other hand, South Asian states have responded with violence in the form of civil war and through violations of human rights disregarding international norms, to name a couple. Incumbent regimes have unleashed state sponsored violence against minorities, and against political opponents. The nature and scope of this violence varied by time and place, and of course, this violence is inherently unequal in terms of its scope, nature, and efficacy. To a large extent, these violent acts have been institutionalized and normalized through routine actions. This is not unique to South Asia, but a common feature of politics in general:

Political violence is hardly a new phenomenon, however novel the public and media attention to certain of its forms makes it appear. Nor has it ever been one-sided or singular in scope: political violence has multiple forms, perpetrators, victims and purposes. It transpires alongside and interlaces with non-violent politics and multiple struggles for peace and justice; it is habitually a part of modern political life but never the whole story.¹

Despite the ubiquity of political violence, there has been very little exploration of the nature and scope of political violence in South Asia. Various dimensions of violence not only shape politics, but also the cultures and economy of the region with implications for the citizens in their daily lives. Yet, extant literature on political violence is limited, both in terms of its theoretical implications and from a comparative and

regional perspective. A particular weakness of the extant literature is its emphasis on causality. Moreover, available datasets tend to underreport violence as both reports on local forms of violence and extensive data on various forms of violence are non-existent.² Thus, the complexity and heteroglossity of political violence, and the need to understand them within a larger political-economic arena has been largely ignored; instead discussions have been reduced to a few causal factors.

This volume intends to draw attention to this gap and offer some perspectives to the various dimensions of political violence in the region. In doing so, we considered political violence in the larger sense of political, that is above and beyond institutions such as elections, although institutions are not excluded as they play a crucial role in producing and reproducing violence, but also are an integral part of social relationships where social norms and the role of the individual agency play seminal roles. Both institutional and non-institutional dimensions of political violence are explored by the authors of this volume. We are cognizant of the debate on the definition of violence: due to the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon it should be viewed beyond physical violence even to the extent of structural violence. However, following Kalyvas we have adopted a minimalist definition of violence: 'at a very basic level, violence is the deliberate infliction of harm on people'.³

The origin of political violence in South Asia can be traced back to its colonial history that defined the relationships between groups, society and states, as well as the neighboring countries.⁴ In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the legacy of partition has produced 'conflict cleavages' that influence the functions of state institutions and internal politics. These cleavages have been further exploited by political elites.⁵ The decades-long conflict in Jammu-Kashmir, communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in India, the state's persecution of minority groups in Chittagong Hill Tract region in Bangladesh, north-east states of India, Balochistan in Pakistan and Tamils in Sri Lanka, to name a few of the ongoing political conflicts in the subcontinent demonstrate how state building efforts have engendered political violence by the state and against the state. Is it because these states were 'insufficiently imagined'?⁶ Or is it because these states face 'cartographic anxiety'?⁷ There is no denying that 'cartographic anxiety marks the very symptom of the "nation-state" – a disquiet inhabiting the fault line between "nation" and "state," two distinct entities a hyphen has long attempted to stitch together'.⁸ But in the context of South Asia, it has deeper implications for the incessant violence we witness. Here 'the gap between state representations and the imaginaries held by citizens of that state, or between a dominant majority and an ethnic, religious, or political minority'⁹ serves as the source of violence and determines the course of violence too. While underscoring the domestic dynamics of state making as an explanatory factor of political violence in South Asia, we should not ignore 'the impact of the international system on domestic structures and preferences'.¹⁰ The external-internal encounters influence how states act and react to the challenges to its monopoly on violence. There is no archetypical model of this external-internal action. It also influences violence of how non-state actors respond to the state's actions.

One of the most obvious forms of political violence is civil war. Although Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan have not seen a civil war in recent years Nepal and Sri Lanka have been devastated by bloody civil wars for decades. In Nepal, the Maoist instigated civil war to overthrow the monarchy cost almost 13,000 lives and displaced 200,000 people between 1996 and 2006.¹¹ The desire of Sri Lankan Tamils for an independent state turned into a civil war that lasted from 1983 to 2009 killing over 70,000 people in the process.¹² Different conclusions of these two civil wars have implications for future trajectories of violence in these countries. It is impossible to put them behind as only 'past', particularly without addressing the large-scale human rights violation and instances of war crimes perpetrated by all parties. Unfortunately, neither in Sri Lanka nor in Nepal has such a process made any substantive progress in the past years. Sri Lanka's government promised to establish a transitional justice mechanism on the atrocities and human rights abuses committed by both the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but as of late March 2018, there has been no progress.¹³ As for Nepal, the establishment of two war crimes commissions raised hopes, only to be turned into despair for the survivors and their families.¹⁴ These examples not only reflect the culture of denial but more importantly the culture of impunity; it exists not only during the state of emergency or war but at other times too. Impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators, especially those who enjoy the support of the state either as a member of the state agencies or as a member of the ruling party, irrespective of the country encourages further violence. This culture is prevalent throughout the region.

It is important to note that, in South Asian countries, political violence at the national level has been marked by identity politics that has been further exploited by political elites. Elite manipulation theory, which is a widely used approach to the study of nationalism and ethnic conflicts, has a serious bearing on understanding the violence in South Asia. But we are also aware of the limitations of such an explanation: neither is the elite a homogenous entity nor can the group that is mobilized be reified as a single unit. Besides, it is imperative to explore why and how interpretations of one set of elites becomes more appealing than others?¹⁵ It is also worth mentioning that occasionally these identities, whether based on ethnicity or language or religion transcend the boundaries, which makes it a regional issue rather than a national question.

Violence against religious minorities, state violence towards political dissents, the influence of transnational terrorism, and growing intolerance towards the 'Other' in society have become more pronounced over time and is increasingly becoming the defining feature of these countries. The violence has been used by political parties as it suits their immediate agenda and the state has used all coercive apparatuses at its disposal to confront it. State perpetrated violence is often guided by the agenda of the ruling party. For example, in Bangladesh, violence in the wake of the 10th National Election in 2014 has cost over 550 lives since 2013.¹⁶ After the election, the ruling party responded with heavy-handed measures toward the opposition's protests. On the first anniversary of the controversial election, between January and March 2015, the country was gripped by heightened violence – arson attacks on vehicles, activities of the opposition activists, and the indiscriminate use of force resulted in 112 deaths.

Some died in the custody of law enforcement agencies. Deadly intra- and inter-party violence continued in the following years. The actions of the state agencies have raised serious concerns of widespread violations of human rights.

In Bangladesh, the crackdown on the opposition has been intertwined with the government's response to militant groups affiliated with transnational terrorist organizations. Bangladesh witnessed the rise of militant groups affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State (IS) and experienced gruesome attacks since 2013 including an attack on a café in 2016 that cost 29 lives. However, akin to many other countries after 9/11, national security has been used as a justification to extend the power of law enforcement agencies that has eroded civil liberties. While Bangladeshi state has adopted this approach in recent years, other South Asian states have been using the same in various forms for quite some time. The pre-eminence of the military in the Pakistani ruling bloc since its inception in 1947, thanks to the Indo-Pakistan relationship and the United States' Cold War policies, allowed the Pakistani state to use national security as an excuse for the suppression of democratic rights.¹⁷ This took a newer dimension after 9/11 when Pakistan became the frontline state in the 'global war on terror' (GWOT). In the case of India, notwithstanding its treatment of Kashmiris since 1948 (which has claimed the lives of 965 security forces, 1,430 civilians, and 3,375 militants between 2005 and 2016), and dealing with the insurgencies in the northeastern states, the POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act), framed after the terrorist attack on its parliament in 2001, has become a tool of the state to acquire unlimited power and use it at will. The Sri Lankan state was never shy in raising the spectre of rebels while engaging in outright violations of human rights and the restriction of civil liberties.

Violence against minorities, unfortunately, has been a grim reality of South Asian societies. A majoritarian mindset has prevailed for a long time, but it has reached a new height in the recent past. There are too many manifestations to go into details, suffice it to mention the tensions and clashes between Buddhist extremists and ethno-religious minority communities in Sri Lanka, continued attacks on Muslims and Christians in India, particularly since the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the longstanding marginalization of the indigenous community in Chittagong Hill Tracts and Hindu community throughout Bangladesh, and violence against Mohajirs, Ahmediand Ismaili communities in Pakistan. India provides an example as to how the use of the rhetoric of divineness and normalization of exclusivist discourse fuels violence. Since the 1990s when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) tried to consolidate its support by using a Hindu nationalist discourse, it has become palpable. Official records show over 4,000 incidents of communal riots from 2011–2016.¹⁸

It is now well recognized that globally religion has assumed greater space in the public sphere including politics,¹⁹ and that South Asia is no different.²⁰ It is also recognized that 'violent ideas and images are not the monopoly of any single religion. Virtually every religious tradition – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh,

and Buddhist – has served as a resource for violent actors'.²¹ Even a cursory glance at the political landscape of South Asia bears this out. Religion-inspired collective violence, in various forms and shapes, has emerged and gained strength. However, unfortunately, 'gross simplifications and outright misrepresentations' regarding the relationship between religion and collective political violence are dominant in the public discourse.²² From communal to sectarian to separatist to militant – all have been witnessed in the region. The Hindutva ideology of the BJP in India and Buddhist majoritarianism in Sri Lanka subscribed to by almost all parties are the most obvious examples. The violence between adherents of various denominations of Islam has wrecked Pakistan for decades. In a country that is already experiencing various kinds of ethnic violence and incessant attacks of terrorist groups, sectarian differences between Sunni and Shia continue to cost hundreds of lives each year. In 2016, there were 34 sectarian terrorist attacks, perpetrated mostly by banned Sunni and Shia militant groups, which killed 104 people.²³ Theological differences alone cannot explain it in its entirety because the violence is shaped by how religion has been transformed into a political ideology. The growing influence of conservative Islamists with the connivance of the 'secularists' in Bangladesh and the selective use of Islam by the ruling party engendering the rhetoric of divisiveness does reveal a trajectory of the future, which we cannot believe is a positive development.

The growing strength of Maoist insurgency in India warrants our attention. Maoists have been engaged in guerrilla warfare against security forces for more than fifty years to overthrow the system perceived as 'semi colonial, semi-feudal that oppresses and exploits the masses'.²⁴ Largely present in districts with high poverty and low literacy rates with support from mostly tribal or low caste²⁵, the movement has been successful in enhancing its appeal. In April 2006, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, described the Maoists as the 'single biggest internal security threat'. Instead of trying to explore the factors that have made the movement appealing, the Indian government has opted for a purely military solution to the conflict. In some measures, the Indian state's response is similar to the Pakistani state's response to Baloch nationalism and Bangladeshi state's policy towards the demands of the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. But what makes the Maoist movement different is its resilience and the potential to transcend national boundaries.

Organization of the volume

Keeping the multifaceted nature of political violence in South Asia in mind, this volume presents some aspects of the phenomenon. The primary objectives of the chapters included in the volume are to explain and understand the phenomenon of political violence in the region. These chapters neither intend to present a chronology of political violence in any country, let alone in the region as a whole, nor are they designed to examine the causality of political violence. This volume can be best described as an attempt to explore how everyday life in South Asian states and societies is transformed by direct and indirect engagement with violence. Adopting an interdisciplinary framework, the volume employs a diverse set of methods – from

ethnographic readings to more macro level analyses – to achieve its goal. The phenomenon is explored from historical, sociological, and political perspectives highlighting the ‘multiple and intersecting dimensions’²⁶ of the issue in the twelve chapters, which are organized into two sections. Each chapter either speaks to an important aspect of the political violence or provides an overall picture of the nature and scope of political violence in the respective country. The first section has three chapters, and addresses overarching aspects of political violence in the region, its theoretical implications, and its representation. The second section includes case studies of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

In the first chapter, Ali Riaz offers a taxonomy of the various forms of political violence in five South Asian nations. In doing so, the chapter achieves three significant goals. On the one hand, it broadens the concept of political violence by adding two elements: a) that political violence must occur within the ‘public-political realm’ and b) that political violence must have legitimacy in forms of recognition and justification by agents other than perpetrator of the violence. On the other hand, in light of the changing nature of political violence, Riaz studies the disaggregated data, historical trends, political history, anthropological observations, and media reports, to highlight the multiplicity and magnitude of political violence in the region. Riaz identifies six categories of political violence – ethnic, religious, sectarian, ideological, institutional and secessionist/separatists – in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Riaz asserts that the state plays an undeniable role in generating political violence in the region. The states’ roles in perpetuating violence derive from not only the violent origin of the modern nation-state but also the constant need to protect its status as the ‘legitimate monopoly of violence’.

David Jackman in his chapter (Chapter 2) explores how political violence is typically viewed as something out of the usual – ‘a failure within a society’, based on Western notions of the state’s monopoly of violence. As such, his position stands in contrast to Riaz. Jackman argues that in South Asian societies violence isn’t outside of political order but rather a key component of it. The interconnection of the economy with politics and the dispersion of violence also means that political violence has a much broader impact on and is much more intertwined with society. Rent is extracted from society by the control of resources like public services in which violence plays an important role. Violence used by these specialists is usually violence by coercion of which the greatest power is a type of latent violence in which they can get what they want without using violence or even creating conflict. Jackman shows that in South Asian cities this interaction is a part of daily life especially for the poorer denizens. In the absence of the state’s monopoly of violence, political order comes from ‘violence specialists’ working together and dependent on each other to keep their control, which demonstrates that the Western notion of the state’s monopoly of violence is a flawed way to view violence in South Asia.

Zaman’s chapter (Chapter 3) takes a different approach to understand the nature of political violence. Her chapter focuses on the representation of violence rather than the causes of or conditions of violence. She uses fiction to provide an overview of the representation of political violence in the region. By examining

critically acclaimed English fiction from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, Zaman draws attention to how the individual and personal struggles of the fictional characters are integrated within the larger political contexts in South Asia. Zaman identifies four broader categories of representation of political violence in the region. First, predominantly written by Indian and Pakistani writers, novels such as the *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar, *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh, and *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie shed light on the 1947 partition violence and its continuing post-colonial memories; second, in the wake of 9/11, Afghani and Pakistani novels, such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *The Wasted Vigil* by Nadeem Aslam, and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, have highlighted how global violence intertwines with the lives of individual characters in their respective societies; third, with a particular focus on the Naxal movement in India, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* and most recently, Neel Mukherjee's novel *The Lives of Others* illustrate how the state is both a perpetrator and victim of political violence; and fourth, the novels by Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan writers, for example, Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* as well as Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and V.V. Ganeshananthan's *Love Marriage*, grapple with the war violence along with its memories and continued sufferings.

The second section of the book starts with the case study of Bangladesh by Saimum Parvez, who offers a broad picture of the patterns and trends of political violence in Bangladesh (Chapter 4). Against the backdrop of Bangladesh's long history with political violence since its independence, Parvez's analysis offers a closer examination of the period between 2000 and 2017. The nature of political violence in Bangladesh is characterized by violent clashes, often state-sponsored, between major political parties, particularly during and after national elections, and incidents of extremism. The chapter shows that 201,827 people have been either killed or injured in recent years, in particular during the controversial 10th national election in 2014, indicating a rise in the number of violent incidents in Bangladesh. Most importantly, Parvez argues and successfully demonstrates that political violence in Bangladesh needs to be understood through lenses of multilayered, yet interdependent, features of the country's politics that foster violence. On the one hand, limited political opportunities and a coercive state response, amplified by the 'dynastic', 'clientelistic', and the zero-sum nature of the political system, breeds violence at the national or macro-level. On the other hand, a lack of democratic practices leads to violence not only between parties but within the political parties as well. Last but not least, personal motivations and the influences of social relationships at the micro-level also contribute to growing political violence in Bangladesh.

Zobaida Nasreen in her chapter on Bangladesh (Chapter 5) focuses on how everyday state violence creates an ecology of fear and suspicion among the indigenous population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). A long conflict, which displaced thousands of indigenous people, ended in 1997 yet continues to be a part of life in the region. The chapter provides an anthropological reading of how state power is often exercised 'visibly and invisibly' through fear, suspicion, and distrust

of the agents of the state, such as the military, the new settlers, and members of local political groups. This fear is displayed not only through physical violence but also 'symbolic violence'. For example, fear of the color similar to the military uniform, contributes to the tools of the state's domination. Moreover, self-surveillance is another common form of oppression as the military's use of indigenous people in the army, and as informants destroys relationships within the communities. Nasreen also argues that, in CHT, language serves as both an indicator of domination by the military and resistance by the indigenous people. Establishment language is used by the indigenous people to avoid unpleasant situations, but when communicating with each other, they prefer their own language that the military or Bengali settlers do not understand. Hence, Nasreen argues, violence by the state agencies in the creation of the culture of distrust and suspicion has become the reality of indigenous lives and regional politics.

Riot between Hindus and Muslims in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh of India in 2013 serves as the point of departure for discussions on political violence in India for both Maya Chadda (Chapter 6) and Mujibur Rehman (Chapter 7), respectively. Chadda examines the history and context of violence and offers a framework as to how such violence can be prevented. The chapter identifies three preconditions for violence to escalate – mutual hatred, an organization with members to carry out violence, and a failure of the states – and argues that in the case of the Muzaffarnagar Riot in 2013 all of these conditions were present. The hatred was created from different campaigns such as the 'Love Jihad' campaign, while the RSS provided organizational resources. Moreover, the state's 'inaction, tardiness, complacency and at times outright complicity' has played a significant role in escalating the violence. Current strategies to prevent violence include improving the ability of the government and police to prevent riots through increased presence, better information, and independence as well as addressing the underlying issues by strengthening, opening institutions, and promoting inter-communal understanding. Chadda argues that building a 'violence control system that extends vertically through state and national government as well as horizontally into a coalition of civil society and party organizations' is a better alternative preventative measure. A coalition comprised of different groups and actors from different parts of society and levels of government is a better-equipped framework to create trust in the state.

Mujibur Rehman (Chapter 7) questions the characterization of Hindu-Muslim riots as 'communal' and makes a case for examining them through the prism of political context. Rehman argues that although the role of religion can't be ignored, it is naïve to disregard the influence of political elites and the political landscape and environment in shaping the nature of violence. In the case of the Muzaffarnagar riot, Rehman argues the local Hindu and Muslim political elites used the riot as an opportunity to strengthen their political positions and politicize the incidents for electoral interests. Understanding the role of politics in the Muzaffarnagar riot is significant because it also indicates a new form politics in India. Rehman claims that the new form of politics in India is embodied by the rise of right-wing Hindutva ideology and the growing support of the Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP). Rehman concludes that in the new form of politics in India, a secular political party deploys the same tactics as the religio-political parties like the BJP. This finding is particularly worrying as this changing characteristic of Indian polity can put minority rights and the prospects of secular polity that values citizen's rights in danger.

Hafsa Kanjwal's chapter (Chapter 8) focuses on the Kashmiri youth-led resistance against the Indian state since the late 2000s. The conflict in Kashmir has been ongoing throughout the second half of the twentieth century with each generation inheriting the conflict due to the failure of a secular and constitutional solution. Kanjwal contextualizes the contemporary political struggle in Kashmir, starting with Kashmiri resistance against Dogra rule in the late colonial period, to partition and its aftermath, and the armed militancy of the late 1980s, seeing how Kashmiri youth articulate their own political history. A new generation of youth, 'empowered with new information and communication technologies that increase the movement's social and cultural reach' have mobilized themselves outside of the formal polity to expand the movement, Kangwal argues. Contrary to the popular belief that religious extremism is the main contributing factor for youth to join militant groups in Kashmir, the author claims that constant repression by the state, particularly towards youth, is the significant factor for youth-led violence. The state's response toward the youth activists includes killings, arrests, torture, and restrictions on expression.

Shubho Basu (Chapter 9) raises important questions about the ideological attitude of Maoists towards violence with a focus on how minority groups, particularly women, became the agents of revolutionary violence in Nepal between 1996 and 2006. In Nepal since 1990, democratization expectations of marginalized communities have been shattered by the slow structural transformation. This intensified various disenfranchised groups' distrust of the government. These grievances created an opportunity for the Maoist groups to inject the violent route. Analyzing the twenty-years long 'People's war' in the country, Basu argues that the Maoist People's war emphasized 'violence as transformative tactics and guerrilla warfare' as the only tool, leading to a civil war marked by 'mass killings, displacement of populations, militarization of women and an overall political culture of society and a steady erosion in a shared lived world'. The chapter highlights that the state's monopoly on violence was disrupted as the state itself handed over its responsibilities, such as 'governance and delivery of social goods', to the local political elites; thus, it legitimized as well as normalized everyday violence by the local elites against subaltern masses. Added to the ineffectiveness of this governance, weak institutions, and a power struggle between the political elites contributed to the escalation of violence in rural Nepal.

Farhat Huq, in her chapter (Chapter 10), challenges the fiction of the state being an unitary actor that protects its title as the sole legitimate holder of violence by pointing out that in the case of Pakistan, the 'state' has at times willingly shared 'legitimate use of violence' with non-state actors to achieve strategic aims. The three distinct examples in Pakistan provide evidence as to how political forces and militant groups serve as allies to achieve political goals as well as electoral interests.

Huq shows that maintaining relationships with militia groups enabled Muttheda Quami Mahaj (MQM) to exercise control over the political landscape of Karachi, while the Deobandi organizations strategically deployed 'ballots and bullets' to control the claims of power over interpretation of religious dogma as well as mosques, neighborhoods, and the electorate. The author also states the Barelvis use the passion for the Prophet, thus, embodying the characteristics of militant organizations. This less documented dynamics of violence or threat of violence is reshaping Pakistan's political landscape by decreasing the differentiating gap between 'normal politicking and use of violence' as well as armed militias, organized criminal groups, militant groups, and the increasing interdependence of mainstream political parties.

Neil DeVotta and Nirmal Dewasiri offer explanations for the long-standing trend of political violence in Sri Lanka. Neil DeVotta (Chapter 11) makes a distinction between political Buddhism and non-violent Buddhist values and shows how religion has become a political ideology. Through an exploration of Sri Lanka's history of the past 70 years, the country experienced violence – 'in the form of ethno-religious riots, insurgencies, and civil war'. DeVotta argues that target groups have changed but the nature of the violence has remained the same – state sponsored and majoritarian violence against the minority. The chapter argues that the political elites have manipulated political Buddhism, which is fundamentally different from the peaceful principles of religion and created the 'Sinhalese Buddhist majoritarianism' as a political tool. The author predicts that the politics of majoritarianism in Sri Lanka puts minorities, in particular the Muslim community, in danger because the politics of majoritarianism believes that Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhalese who are in charge to 'preserve and promote' Buddhism.

Nirmal Dewasiri's chapter (Chapter 12), in the process of explaining the relationship between violence and the political process in Sri Lanka, analyzes how violence has been normalized as a tool of the postcolonial polity of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka, on the one hand, has evolved as a vibrant democracy with a citizenry regularly participating in the political process, yet on the other hand, the state's violent capacity vis-à-vis the society has grown significantly making the state more reliant on coercive capacity. Two major armed uprisings increased the capacity of the state to imbue a perception that violence is the 'the most effective agency in solving state-society confrontations'. Dewasiri argues that there are four different ways violence has been structured and institutionalized: a) violence has served as a 'mediatory agency' between the actors within the democratic process and those who are outside of it; b) groups that hold a majority, such as the Sinhala-Buddhist, have favorable views towards the growing political violence; c) the state has increasingly used violence against the dissenters including public demonstrations, and intergroup conflicts; and d) the growth of military capacities and confrontations between the state politically motivated armed insurgents. The state's increasing capacity and use of violence to quell political dissent raises significant questions about the future of democracy in Sri Lanka.

Notes

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- 3 Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xv.
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- 6 The term is used by Salman Rushdie about Pakistan (Salman Rushdie, *Shame*, (New York: Picador, 1983), 86) but considering similar problems faced by other states, we argue it may be used for others South Asian states too.
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1

A TAXONOMY OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

Ali Riaz

Political violence is ubiquitous in South Asia. Instability in South Asian countries, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, has been subject to media attention and discussions for quite a long time. With ‘probably [...] the highest number of armed formations engaged in political violence, and the greatest variations in terms of their ideological orientations’¹ the region warrants further exploration of actors, forms, causes of, and conditions for persistence of political violence. There is a growing body of literature on violence in general and particularly on political violence, in the past decades.² Yet, a taxonomy of political violence in South Asia is wanting.

This chapter draws attention to this lacuna and offers a preliminary sketch as a proposal for further discussions. The chapter identifies common factors of violence within five nations and categorize them under several themes drawing on the defining characteristics. Taking a broad range of collective actions, from insurgency to religion inspired violence to state sponsored/perpetrated violence, this chapter demonstrates that ethnic, religious, sectarian, ideological, institutional, and secessionist/separatist violence are present in different formulations in the region. It also argues that states in South Asia play a conspicuous role not only in exerting institutional violence (i.e. violence perpetrated by institutions such as state or political parties) but also in other forms of violence. Notwithstanding the different forms of violence, identity politics plays an influential role in engendering them.

Conceptual clarifications

Political violence is a concept that is far from straightforward and yet it is used quite frequently. Nowhere is it more obvious than in the available definitions of the concept. While Patrick O’Neil highlights ‘politically motivated violence outside of state control’³ as the key aspect of political violence, Wilke et al. unequivocally state, ‘violence should be considered political if and when it aims at the state.’⁴ Studies and discussions on political

violence often start from a minimalist understanding that political violence is ‘violence that is committed in the context of a political conflict, or that can be related, either through its cause or through its motive, to political issues.’⁵ The definition is open to interpretations as to what constitutes a cause or a motive and whether the action it is connected to is the issue in question. There is also the understanding that political violence is ‘not simply individual aggression writ large.’⁶

Notwithstanding the definitional ambiguity and dominance of two ‘unsatisfactory’ strands of accounts, extant studies on political violence, particularly that which drives policy-making processes, is fraught with another serious problem: what is described as political violence is often based on value judgment rather than a descriptive presentation of the fact. This problem is intrinsically connected to an *a priori* assumption as to what constitutes political violence, that is, certain actions are already identified as political violence while others are not.

This, then, is followed by efforts to offer causal explanations. Within this schema individual behavior serves as the point of departure. The discussions follow the path of making a distinction between individual crimes and group violence, and consequently endeavor to explain why individuals commit violence, but as a group instead of as an individual. In this regard, Tilly has appropriately summarized that there are three schools of thought – idea people, behavior people, and relation people. The idea people underscore that ‘worth of others and desirability of aggressive actions significantly affect the propensity of a person or a people to join in collective violence’; the behaviorist school has its genesis in the evolutionary explanations, that is collective violence is ‘sum of individual behaviors’ and is a result of tied to ‘impacts of particular genes.’ However, it has recently transformed into an argument in favor of human agency. Within this frame, the individual has the autonomy of motives, impulses, and opportunities. Behaviorists argue against the deterministic nature of ideas, and against any structures. The relation people, on the other hand, argue that ‘transactions among persons and groups [are] far more central than idea or behavior.’⁷ The structuralists can be included in this category, as they tend to render a primacy to socio-economic structures in shaping human behaviors. Some suggest that a combination of these three elements causes violent behavior. Tilly has suggested that Classical Marxists fall within this category, although there is an economic determinism inherent in this approach.

Kalyvas, drawing on the available studies, argues that:

Political actors use violence to achieve multiple, overlapping, and sometimes mutually contradictory goals. Various literatures detail more than twenty uses for violence, including intimidation, demoralization, polarization, demonstration, radicalization of the public, publicity, the improvement of group morale, the enforcement or disruption of control, the mobilization of forces and resources, financing, the elimination of opposing forces, the sanction of cooperation with the enemy, and the provocation of countermeasures and repression.⁸

It is also true that ‘violence may be used with no goal in mind.’ These causality arguments, however, fail to provide a clear definition of ‘political violence.’

Comprehending the concept of political violence requires it to be situated within the discussion of 'collective violence.' There are three categories with this: situational, organized, and institutional. The defining characteristic of situational collective violence is that they are 'unplanned and spontaneous.' As such, there is no premeditation and 'collective' is not pre-determined formulation. On the contrary, the organized collective violence is by definition organized but lacks 'institutional authorization.' That does not necessarily mean that it is not authorized by a group and rationalized through an ideology. Instead often it is the group's pre-meditation that allows this to take place. The institutional collective violence 'is carried out under the direction of legally constituted officials.'⁹

These two strands, causality and categories, while apparently treading two different paths can be reconciled. A simple way to bring these two together is to reformulate them as institutional, ideational, and individual explanations and examining the reasoning. Institutional violence is that which originates in the actions of existing institutions. O'Neil has suggested that 'existing institutions may encourage violence or constrain human action, creating a violent backlash'; the sources and justification of ideational violence rest on the ideas/ ideologies – 'ideas may justify or promote the use of violence'; and 'psychological or strategic factors which may lead people to carry out violence' are categorized as individual violence.¹⁰

Categories and explanations, although offering a broad picture, do not offer a precise definition. To develop a workable definition, we need to explore how violence is defined in the extant studies. Kalyvas sheds light on the complexity of the defining violence:

Though it may be an intuitive concept, violence is a conceptual minefield. As a multifaceted social phenomenon, it can be defined very broadly and stretched way beyond physical violence (Nordstrom and Martin 1992:8). Some distinguish between violence that preserves the social order ('systemically functional' violence) and violence that destroys it ('dysfunctional' violence) (C. Friedrich 1972; Sorel 1921); others take social and economic oppression (or even competition) to be forms of 'structural' violence (Braud 1999; Galtung 1975; Ellul 1969:86). Finally, some think that the range of social acts that qualify as violence is so broad as to include any act that results in mental anguish.¹¹

Despite such variations, violence is commonly referred to as 'behavior designed to inflict physical injury on people or damage to property,'¹² or 'any observable interaction in the course of which persons or objects are seized or physically damaged in spite of resistance,'¹³ or actions 'intended to shape the behavior of a targeted audience by altering the expected value of particular actions.'¹⁴ As such, the physical dimension remains the primary focus of violence.

Donatella della Porta builds her definition of political violence from this dominant position. Porta says, 'Political violence consists of those repertoires of collective action that involve great physical force and cause damage to an adversary to achieve political aims.'¹⁵ In this regard, Porta has highlighted two issues: physical force and causing damage to those who are at the receiving end. Porta concludes, 'political violence, then, is the use of physical force to damage a political adversary.'

While I adopt Porta's definition for this study, I would like to add two elements to it: that political violence must be acted within the public arena; and that it has to have some legitimacy. Actions that take place within the private sphere, even when they inflict injury and have a political goal cannot be considered as political violence. My conceptualization of public is not drawn from a binary division between private and public, but instead from Hannah Arendt's explanation of politics. Arendt distinguishes between three realms: 'The private; the public-political, which is the civil realm where all citizens have equal rights; and the "social", where people may freely come together with or exclude whomever they wish.'¹⁶ It is well to bear in mind that the conventional conceptualization of private-public domain is now in flux because not only private actors are engaged in the public realms, which has always been the case, but because the state which traditionally used to remain in the public domain is now increasingly inserting itself in the private domain. I am arguing that the political violence has itself to be located within the public-political realm, because I consider that this is the only domain that is explicitly political. As Arendt has explained eloquently, 'Of all activities necessary and present in human communities, only two are deemed to be political and to constitute what Aristotle called *bios politikos*, namely action (praxis) and speech (lexis).'¹⁷ The political violence is both praxis and lexis.

The second element, legitimacy, is not used in the Weberian sense of the term but is based on a revision of Weber's notion. In my formulation, there are three levels of legitimacy with regard to political violence. The first level of legitimacy is that it has taken place within the public domain. The action has inserted itself into the public domain and established its presence. The second level of legitimacy is about recognition: through either positive or negative recognition. Positive recognition, in this instance, is not based on its goal, effectiveness, or its quality, but only by virtue of 'owning' it. When it is authorized by an institution, whether the state or an open or clandestine group, it gains positive legitimacy. Conversely, it can gain legitimacy by negative responses, from the state or other institutions. The state's response to confront it is an example of negative legitimacy. The third level of legitimacy of political violence is that it is considered justified, even if partially. When public violence with a political objective is committed and agents other than those who committed the violent action recognize to some extent that it is, at least partially, justified, it gains the legitimacy as a political violence.

Political violence and state

It is against the backdrop of the legitimacy question that we must bring the issue of state into the discussion. The state, as we are aware, holds the legitimate monopoly of violence: 'A state is a human community that claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. The state is considered the sole source of the right to use violence.'¹⁸ How was the monopoly of violence established? This is intrinsically linked to how modern nation-states have been established in Europe and how we have conceptualized the institution that we call 'state.' Machiavelli's suggestion that 'a successful prince is must be willing to use violence judiciously,' Trotsky's position that 'every state is founded on force,' and Tilly's suggestion that 'war made the state and the state made war' all point to that state's dependence on violence as a, if not the, founding principle. It is not only that states were established through violence, but the legitimate claim of monopoly needs to be protected at all time. The protection implies the use of, or the threat of using, the violence. Martin Shaw's claim that 'states are practitioners of slaughter par excellence'¹⁹ is accurate on two counts: first, there have been a high number of casualties in the intra-state conflict in the past centuries, secondly, states have used the monopoly for 'the sake of terror and annihilation.'²⁰ As such, the state is an actor in (real and/or potential) political violence.

As the holder of the 'legitimate monopoly of violence' the state not only has the ability to use it to ensure security of its citizens or conversely exerting political violence against its own citizens but also it has the power and authority to determine the difference between good and bad violence. This is one of the critical elements I mentioned earlier when I discussed the legitimacy of political violence. By describing an act of political violence and through confronting it, the state indirectly provides legitimacy to the action.

We must also be cognizant of the fact that, in this day and age, there is no state that can claim to have a complete monopoly over violence within a territorially demarcated area. States face challenges from non-state actors of various kinds, and in many instances the non-state actors openly adopt violence as a tactic to undermine the authority of the state from an ideational point of view. In those circumstances, the state overtly exercises its right to use violence. Circumstances like this are a testimony to the decline of the legitimacy of the state itself. But this does not mean that all violence that challenge the state's monopoly is political violence.

These roles of the state make it imperative that we locate the state within the spectrum of political violence. Based on actors and target variables, the state can be both an actor and a target. The state as an actor can be engaged in violence with state and civilians; similarly, non-state actors can target the state and civilians. As an actor, the state's violence against another state is considered war, while violence targeted against civilians within the country is considered a violation of human rights. Large-scale violations of human rights, with lethal implications, can be considered as war crimes, particularly in a situation where the state is a party to a conflict. Acts of crimes against humanity and war crimes have implications beyond

the boundaries of the state. On the other hand, non-state actors can engage in violence against the state; often these kinds of violence take the form of a guerrilla war. Such actions, in some instances, are described as terrorism, where terrorism is defined as the systematic use of violence in order to intimidate government with the goal of effecting political, religious, or ideological change. Violence committed against civilians is indisputably considered terrorism. The state can be engaged in another kind of violence: state-sponsored terrorism. When the state provides material support to violent non-state actors engaged in terrorism, it is considered state-sponsored terrorism.

Studies of South Asian political violence

Despite a recent surge in studies on political violence, particularly on causes of conflict and violence, available explanations have clustered around two poles, according to Kalyvas. He argues:

One, descriptively rich and highly dramatic, is associated with a view of violence as an irrational and atavistic pathology, whereas the other takes violence to be an outcome of narrowly instrumental goals, in a way that is often tautological.²¹

Kalyvas concluded that 'both are unsatisfactory and misleading.' In so far as the extant studies on political violence in South Asia are concerned, three stands are easily identifiable. They are state-centered security studies, society-centered structural analyses, and empirical studies. The first stand's exclusive focus on the state leaves little room for exploration of societal factors and they tend to present the acts of political violence as a threat to the order. In these studies, the state is often presented as a monolithic entity. The historical background of state formation and its consequences in engendering the contestations seldom feature in these studies. However, the pattern is changing as researchers are increasingly recognizing the role of the state in the non-institutional violence, for example religious and sectarian violence.

The sociological and anthropological studies on political violence, which comprise the second strand, have problematized the concept of national security on the one hand and explored the structural genesis of various kinds of political violence on the other. However, the specificity of some of these studies acts as an impediment to making generalizations.

Studies within the third strand concentrate on ongoing conflicts, and they are primarily descriptive. The historical backgrounds provided in these studies are consistent with dominant popular narrative. These studies are rich in information but are not helpful in locating political violence as a phenomenon. Most of the policy briefs, and backgrounders fall within these categories. Besides, one common feature across these three strands is the preponderance of country studies. There are very few, if any, studies that have taken the region as a unit of analysis.

Data on South Asia: Availability and issues

There are three kinds of problems regarding data on violence, particularly political violence, in South Asia. The first is availability. The only data set available covering all the countries of South Asia is from the ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project). It provides political violence and protest data for developing states.²² Country-level data sets are rarely available. For Pakistan two data sets are available: the BFRS data set, which contains incident-level data on political violence in Pakistan from January 1988 to December 2010 based on press reporting,²³ and the Pakistan Conflict Tracker covers data from 2012.²⁴ Data on India are available at the Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research (INSCR) of the Center for Systemic Peace.²⁵ But the data are partial as they only look at subnational violence between 1960 and 2004. For Bangladesh, incidents of political violence are tracked by human rights groups; these databases compile information from press reports. The figures are available from 2001. These databases, for example the database of Odhikar, label only inter-party and intra-party violence as political violence while institutional violence (for example custodial deaths, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings) and violence against minorities are listed differently.²⁶

The second problem is the absence of disaggregation by categories. Various categories of violence are lumped together making it almost impossible to develop a nuanced study. The third issue is in part a definitional problem. Due to the presence of transnational terrorist groups and their activities, some databases have not made a distinction between their activities and the violent activities of other social/political groups. I argue that the violence perpetrated by groups with a global agenda deserves to be treated separately. This is equally true for the fatalities due to US drone attacks in Pakistan.

The extent of political violence in four countries – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka – can be gleaned from the data of 2015. The data, gathered from the ACLED database is presented below.

The taxonomy

Drawing on the disaggregated data, historical trends, political history, anthropological observations, and media reports, I have identified six categories of political violence present in the region: ethnic, religious, sectarian, ideological, institutional, and secessionist/separatists violence. Table 1.3 summarizes the defining characteristics of each categories, examples, and actors.

While the taxonomy offers a broad picture, it is necessary to acknowledge that developing a tightly compartmentalized taxonomy is challenging at various levels, especially because some characteristics overlap with more than one category. For example, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India acts as both a religious and ideological organization and the violence perpetrated by it often takes place at the intersection of these two categories. Similarly, sectarian groups in Pakistan have

TABLE 1.1 Fatalities in 2015

<i>Month</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<i>Total</i>
January	55	52	384	1	492
February	79	38	192	0	309
March	35	21	369	0	425
April	24	53	325	0	402
May	14	60	374	0	448
June	17	65	197	2	281
July	20	73	119	1	213
August	39	99	227	0	365
September	22	52	175	0	249
October	27	57	189	0	273
November	17	57	97	0	171
December	21	35	156	0	212
Total	370	662	2804	4	3840

TABLE 1.2 Incidents in 2015

<i>Month</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<i>Total</i>
January	392	392	228	46	1058
February	383	346	185	5	919
March	195	329	205	8	737
April	86	383	207	7	683
May	42	320	199	4	565
June	28	301	124	6	459
July	29	377	124	8	538
August	55	354	132	5	546
September	54	391	104	7	556
October	40	547	96	8	691
November	56	669	75	3	803
December	81	982	124	10	1197
Total	1441	5391	1803	117	8752

operated in connivance with state agencies to pursue an ideological war. It is also worth noting that some of the secessionist movements are based on ethnic identities and thus can be categorized as both ethnic violence and secessionist/separatist violence. The list of the organizations identified with each category of violence is not exhaustive as there are other organizations that are engaged in similar kinds of violence; yet these organizations are identified as illustrations, primarily for their familiarity. Equally

TABLE 1.3 Taxonomy of Political Violence in South Asia

<i>Category</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Actors</i>
Ethnic	Conflict between groups based on their ethnic identity to establish control over resources such as land or opportunities; to establish supremacy over other group(s); two dimensions of the ethnic identity: language, and territoriality	Assamese versus Bengalis (India, Northeast), Bengalis versus Indigenous People (Bangladesh, Chittagong Hill Tracts); Mahrastrian versus UP/Bihari migrants (Maharashtra); Tamil vs Kannadigas (Karnataka); Muhajir versus non-Muhajirs (Karachi); Madhesis vs Bahun/Chettri/Newar, Sinhalese vs Tamil (Sri Lanka)	ULFA, AGP, AASU (India); Sama Odhikar Andolon (Bengali settlers in CHT), PCJSS (Indigenous People's Organizations in CHT); MNS (Maharaatra Navnirman Sena (MNS); LTTE
Religious	Religious practices and beliefs are at the center of these conflicts involving two or more different religions. However, religious conflict can be motivated by political, social, economic, and cultural factors.	Muslim vs Hindu, Muslims vs. Christian, Hindu vs Sikh, Hindu vs Christians, Hindu vs Buddhists, Muslims vs Buddhists	RSS, Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal (India); Islamist groups (Bangladesh)
Sectarian	Sectarian violence is violence between or among different sects of one particular religion usually involving non-state actors representing different groups and perpetrating the violence.	Shia vs Sunni, Sunni vs Hazaras, Sunni vs Ahmedis Conflicts between Deobandis, Ahle Hadiths, Barelvīs, Violence against Dalits	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (affiliates of Al-Qaeda), JMB (Bangladesh); Local groups (India)
Ideological	Ideology based violence is the use of violence by groups or individuals to promote their political and social agenda	Maoist vs the Nepali state, Naxalites vs the Indian State, Communist Party vs Bangladesh state	PWG, MCC, PLGA CPUSI (India); CPN, UNPM (Nepal); PBCP, JSS (Bangladesh)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Actors</i>
Institutional	Institutional violence serves or results from institutional objectives. It engages social or state institutions. It is also referred to as structural violence.	Extra judicial killings, Violence perpetrated by political parties against minorities, Intra and inter political party violence	State and law enforcement agencies (RAB & Police in Bangladesh; CRP & police in India; ISI in Pakistan; Nepalese Police Force: Sri Lankan military), political parties, religious or social institutions
Secessionist/Separatist	Violence occurs when a group or groups use force or violent tactics in order to withdraw from a larger entity such as a country	Separate state in Bodoland, Independence movement of Assam, Naga Sovereignty movement, and Tripuri; Kashmir separatism in India; Autonomy of CHT Area in Bangladesh; Ongoing Separatist movements in Waziristan, Sindhudesh, Balochistan, Afghan Pashtun separatism in Pakistan	National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), UNLF, ANLA, KLNLF, NDFB, MULTA, UPDS, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Mohammad NNC, NLFT (India); PCSOA (Bangladesh); JSMM, Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz, BLF, GBUM, BLA, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, SLA (Pakistan)

Source: Author's compilation.

Note: AASU: All Assam Student Union; AGP: AsomGanaParishad; ANLA: Achik National Liberation Army; BLA: Balochistan Liberation Army; BLF: Balochistan Liberation Front; CPI: Communist Party of India; CPN: Communist Party of Nepal; CPUSI: Communist Party of United States of India; CRPF: Central Reserve Police Force; GBUM: Gilgit Baltistan United Movement; ISI: Inter-Service Intelligence; JKLF: Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front; JSMM: Jeay Sindh MuttahidaMahaz; JSQM: Jeay Sindh QaumiMahaz; KLNLF: KarbiLongri N.C Hill Liberation Front; LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; MCC: Maoist Communist Centre; MNS: MaharaatraNavnirmanSena; MQM: MttahedaQaumiMahaz; MULTA: Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam; NNC: Naga National Council; NDFB: National Democratic Front of Bodoland; NLFT: National Liberation Front of Tripura; PBCP: Purbo Bangla Communist Party; PCJSS: ParbatyaChattamgram Jana Samhati Samiti; PLGA: Peoples Liberation Guerrilla Army PWG: People's War Group; RAB: Rapid Action Battalion; RSS: *RashtriyaSwayamsevak Sangh*; SLA: *Sindhudesh Liberation Army*; TTP: Tehrik Taliban Pakistan; ULFA: United Liberation Front of Asom; UNLF: *United National Liberation Front*; UNPM: United National People's Movement; UPDS: United People's Democratic Solidarity.

important to note that I have identified those organizations that largely operate within the national boundaries of one country, but some of them have their presence and operation outside the country in which they are based. For example, both the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Harkat-ul Mujahideen are based in Pakistan and have reportedly have been engaged in the Indian-administered Kashmir.

Concluding observations

The preceding discussion shows the variety and extent of political violence in South Asia. Additionally, a few countries in the region have recently witnessed the presence of international terrorist groups in their midst. These make it challenging to discuss political violence and identify overarching patterns in the region. However, this also makes it necessary to examine whether there are similar trends and patterns including causes of and conditions for the persistence of the phenomenon. Geographical contiguity aside, many of these countries share common historical and cultural bonds. The countries, save Nepal, have experienced colonial rule that has profoundly influenced the political structures and social fabric of the countries.²⁷ There seems to be a culture of reciprocity (that is responses to events in other country) among these countries at the societal level.²⁸ Similarly, belligerent and pernicious inter-state rivalry between neighbors leading to material support for insurgents and militant groups of neighboring countries also contributes to sustenance and acceleration of political violence.²⁹

Further exploration of the taxonomy of the political violence allows us to make a few observations. The most important among them is the deep involvement of states in the extant political violence in respective countries. The involvement is not only limited to the institutional violence, wherein the state has used predatory powers against its own citizens, or violently confronted the ideological challenges faced by the state. But also their presence in other arenas is quite palpable. The secular-religious divide, that has become the template in describing many conflicts in the region and where the state has been portrayed as the protector of 'secularism,' is in many instances a consequence of the state's unwillingness to accommodate the long tradition of the presence of faith in the public sphere. Interestingly, South Asian states have made their presence felt in the religious arena too. For example, sectarian violence in Pakistan has been encouraged by the state through various measures. The conflicts between and among various sects are the result of the expedient use of these differences by the state at various times. The growing violence against the Christian community is tolerated by the state. In India, the connivance or acquiescence of the state in religion-inspired violence, primarily against minority Muslim community and the Dalits, is testimony to this. While ethnicity is the key factor in the protracted civil war in Sri Lanka (1983–2009), the religious divide of the contending communities cannot be ignored. Bangladeshi state's silence regarding the plight of religious and ethnic minorities fits into the pattern. The overarching issue is the state's proclivity towards accepting and propagating an explanation of religion (for example the Brahmanical version of

Hinduism in the case of India, the Sunni Hanafi version in the case of Pakistan, Buddhism in the case of Sri Lanka) constricts the space for other interpretations and encourages the violence against those who differ. Often the state becomes directly involved in the violence in favor of one group or the other.

A key source of the political violence in the region is the long-standing unresolved issue pertaining to ethnicity. The project of the post-colonial nation states to create a homogenous national identity has been imposed on the spatially, culturally, politically, and economically marginalized ethnic communities. What should have been an open discourse on national identity, and an effort to accommodate the regionally differentiated, economically disparate, and culturally different nations is often wrecked by states' policies of bulldozing the differences in favor of state sanctioned identity. The state's actions, both violent and non-violent, are a reflection of an anxiety. The violent path adopted by these nationalities is both a response to the statist project and an assertion of a distinct identity.

The identity politics as a driver of violence is not only limited to the ethnic communities, but also inter-religion violence (commonly referred to as communalism), on the one hand and intra-religious violence (violence among various sects within the same religion), on the other. Claiming to be a true adherent of a religion, whether a Muslim or a Hindu, is contingent on the construction of the 'other.'

This kind of violence has no instrumental purpose and is 'directed against persons exclusively on the basis of who they are' – because of their ethnicity or religion or denomination; they are often described as anomic or nihilistic, and viewed as 'expressive violence' (Kalyvas 2006, 24). In the words of James Rule, this kind of violence is for 'strictly consummatory rewards of inflicting pain on one's enemies or destroying a hated symbol.'³⁰ This 'ritualistic, and generally non instrumental' violence³¹ is not merely about relative deprivation or material benefits, but is also symbolic.

Notes

- 1 Boris Wilke, Jochen Hippler, and Muhammad Zakria Zakar, 'Violence Research from North Africa to South Asia: A Historical and Structural Overview,' *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 5(1), (2011): 42.
- 2 The report by the Asian Foundation in 2018, entitled 'The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia' is a good addition to the growing body of literature although it does not exclusively address South Asia.
- 3 Patrick H O'Neil, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, (New York: W W Norton and Company, 2010), 195.
- 4 Wilke, et al. 'Violence Research from North Africa to South Asia,' 37.
- 5 Paul Dumouchel, 'Political Violence and Democracy,' nd. Ritsumeikan University. http://www.ritsumeikan.ac.jp/acd/re/k-rsc/lcs/kiyou/pdf_23-4/RitsIILCS_23.4pp.117-124DUMOUCHEL.pdf (accessed June 14, 2016).
- 6 Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.
- 7 Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 4.
- 8 Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 24.

- 9 Tim Delany, 'Collective Violence,' *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/collective-violence>, nd (accessed June 7, 2016).
- 10 O'Neil, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, 197.
- 11 Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 19.
- 12 H D Graham and Ted Gurr, 'Editor's Introduction' in H D Graham and Ted Gurr (eds), *Violence in America*, (New York: Praeger, 1969), xvii.
- 13 Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1978), 176.
- 14 Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 26.
- 15 Donatella dellaPorta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.
- 16 Martin Greenberg, 'Concerning Hannah Arendt: She Knew She was Right,' *The Yale Review*, 95 (1), January 2007, 27.
- 17 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1959), 12.
- 18 Max Weber, 'Politics as Vocation' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Hans Heinrich Gerth and C Wright Mills, (London: Routledge, 1991), 78.
- 19 Martin Shaw, *War and Genocide*, (London: Polity Press, 2003), 58.
- 20 Herald Wydra, 'The Recurrence of Violence,' *Sociology Compass* 2(1), (2008): 183.
- 21 Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 26.
- 22 This data and analysis project produces information on the specific dates and locations of political violence and protest, the types of event, the groups involved, fatalities, and changes in territorial control. Information is recorded on the battles, killings, riots, and recruitment activities of rebels, governments, militias, armed groups, protesters, and civilians. See here: <http://www.acleddata.com/>. The dataset is managed by the University of Sussex.
- 23 BFRS Data set is available at the Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC) at Princeton University. The project identifies, compiles, and analyzes micro-level conflict data and information on insurgency, civil war, and other sources of politically motivated violence worldwide. <https://esoc.princeton.edu/files/bfrs-political-violence-pakistan-dataset>.
- 24 This is a project of the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) based in Islamabad, Pakistan. It publishes Quarterly Security Report that provides data on political violence. 'CRSS Quarterly Security Report – Q1, 2016,' May 2, 2016. <http://crss.pk/story/crss-quarterly-security-report-q1-2016/> (accessed June 5, 2016).
- 25 See The Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research (INSOCR) Data Page, Center for Systemic Peace, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html> (accessed May 25, 2016).
- 26 See Odhikar, 'Statistics on Political violence,' <http://odhikar.org/statistics/statistics-on-political-violence/> (accessed April 10, 2018).
- 27 Afghanistan was excluded from this study because of the unique political developments of the country. Although it hasn't experienced any long-term colonial presence, repeated external interventions and prolonged wars have made indelible marks on the society and shaped the nature of political violence.
- 28 The demolition of Babri Mosque in India in 1992 followed by violent responses in Pakistan and Bangladesh is perhaps the most telling example in this regard.
- 29 Pakistan's long held policy regarding Kashmir, India's support to rebels of Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh in the 1980s and 1990s, the hospitable approach of Bangladesh to insurgents of Northeast India until 2009, and support to Tamils by India in the early days of the civil war are cases in point.
- 30 James B Rule, *Theories of Civil Violence*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 190.
- 31 Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 24.

2

TOWARDS A RELATIONAL VIEW OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

David Jackman

Reframing political violence

South Asia has witnessed and continues to experience a complex repertoire of political violence. At one extreme sit civil wars, insurgencies and genocides, while far more commonplace phenomena include bombings, strikes, protests, attacks, killings, arson and assassinations. The frequency with which these latter forms of violence mark people's lives, and the significant bearing they have on national politics and local governance, indicate their importance for scholars to understand. A common perception of such violence is that it represents an aberration, a failure within a society to attain particular forms of organization. The language of violence rupturing, scarring and breaking can all carry this idea. Such judgments, however, rest on implicit ideals, often based on perceptions of Western liberal democracy.¹ These prioritize the role of the state, which is idealized as maintaining the rule of law and having the Weberian property of a monopoly on the means of violence. Political order in this model originates within the state, which is the overarching authority, source of governance and arbitrator of justice. When political violence is seen in this light, it thus appears to indicate a gap between how society (and specifically the state) should function and how it does in practice; and terms such as 'weak state' and 'state failure' are deployed to indicate this.

While we may or may not agree with the ideals underlying such judgments, the analytical risk they carry is that they can blind us to the dynamics and nature of political violence. In other words, if the framework on which such judgments are formed does not appropriately reflect the societies in which it is applied, it will lead to inaccurate and unhelpful analytical approaches to political violence. Indeed, on closer inspection a striking characteristic of some of the violence described above is that it appears in South Asia with such regularity and persistence that it seems inadequate to deem it a deviation or aberration, and may even be considered the precise opposite,

deeply entrenched and institutionalized forms of competition and organization. The intention of this chapter is therefore to reorient the concept of political violence conceptually, responding to arguments from South Asia that we need to move away from 'a normative model of a singular liberal state'² and to give attention to how 'de facto sovereign power... has been configured and distributed';³ as well as wider arguments that the concept of political violence lacks theorization,⁴ and should be understood more closely in terms of political order and how it is constituted.⁵

The core argument developed here is that political violence can be better conceptualized through a clearer understanding of how political order is maintained in South Asia. This argument takes its lead from recent political theory concerned with the organization of violence in society and how it is managed.⁶ In a model of society where a central state holds a monopoly on the means of violence, political order⁷ stems from the state asserting this authority and implementing desired modes of governance. As North et al argue, however, in most societies violence is not consolidated and monopolized by the state, but rather is 'dispersed' throughout society. As such, political order stems from balancing the interests of varying 'violence specialists' that exist both within and outside of the formal state. This chapter argues that these violence specialists form part of the dominant socio-economic relationships that people often engage in to maintain their lives and livelihoods. This can be seen clearly in the under-acknowledged and yet pervasive relationship between 'intermediation' or 'brokerage' and violence that is evidenced in studies from across South Asia.

These arguments re-orientate the notion of political violence in a number of ways. By focusing on how political order is contingent on the power of actors operating both within and outside the state, this approach questions frameworks of political violence that rest on a unitary or centralized vision of political authority. This approach also draws analytical attention away from acts of violence themselves, and while not neglecting their importance, points towards the ways in which violence is embedded in the lives of ordinary people through relationships of intermediation or brokerage. It is argued that the significance of these violence specialists is not necessarily that they readily deploy and use violence, but rather that violence is latent,⁸ representing a potential for physical coercion. For violence to be real and present does not therefore mean it has to materialize but that it can underlie the dynamics of such relationships. In arguing that political order is contingent on the rent-seeking of diverse violence specialists organized throughout society, this approach suggests that violence is integral to dominant socio-economic and political relations in South Asian societies, and constitutive, rather than antithetical, to political order.

Maintaining political order

In most societies the state as it is formally defined, does not hold a consolidated or monopolized control over the means of violence. In such contexts the capability to use violence is 'dispersed' throughout society,⁹ and this typically means that a broader set of actors with different characters regularly use violence to promote

their interests. Without a central state monopolizing violence, a critical question that arises concerns how political order is maintained. An answer to this question, posited in broadly similar ways through the notion of a 'Limited Access Order'¹⁰ as well as recent work on 'political settlements',¹¹ is that order is contingent on a balance of power being maintained between different powerful actors within society. For North et al political order, meaning the absence of widespread and large-scale violence, is contingent on the emergence of what they term a 'ruling' or 'dominant' coalition, which is a network of diverse actors, most importantly including elites and violence specialists, organized through factions.¹² Political order is achieved through actors within this coalition agreeing to cooperate with one another, and by maintaining dominance over rival elites, factions and possible coalitions. The control and distribution of resources (or 'rents') is critical within this model and is conceptualized as a key motivating factor for actors within a coalition not to mobilize violently and publically. Violence is thus a key skill, or capability, which can be used 'entrepreneurially';¹³ and as Tilly argues, 'most important political figures have combined entrepreneurship with control of coercive means'.¹⁴ Because a ruling coalition's stability is contingent on rent seeking, politics and the economy cannot be seen as theoretically distinct fields operating to different logics but are deeply intertwined, or 'interlocked'.¹⁵ Economics can be seen as 'politics by other means',¹⁶ meaning that economic advancement is subject to political status.

An implication of this framework is that it emphasizes the need for mutual dependencies between diverse violence specialists/entrepreneurs (these terms are henceforth used interchangeably) for enabling political order. This resonates with Tilly's¹⁷ analysis of European state building, pointing to the constructive roles of diverse violence specialists such as: 'pirates, privateers, paramilitaries, bandits, mercenaries, Mafiosi, militias, posses, guerrilla forces, vigilante groups, company police, and bodyguards'. He notes that these actors operated partly in coordination and sync with larger organizations and wider authorities, but also partly 'follow dynamics of their own'.¹⁸ In practice the precise forms that ruling coalitions take differ between societies. Violence specialists with different organizational characters may form part of coalitions, the degree of mutual cooperation between them can differ; and as Khan's analysis of political settlements also suggests, such coalitions can differ in terms of the relative power of factions within a coalition but at different hierarchical levels, as well as factions within and outside of such a coalition. Contrary to the idea that state authority is consolidated at the center from where it emanates, the state's power is premised here on balancing the interests of diverse violence specialists within a coalition.

This perspective can inform an understanding of political violence in two primary ways. The first concerns the relationship between political order and violence. In a society where order is premised on the monopolization of violence by a central state, political violence is antithetical to how order is constructed; but when a capability for violence is dispersed, violence is inherent in how order is negotiated, and its use can therefore reflect the re-formulation and construction of political order. For example, within this framework, order is contingent on factions within the coalition maintaining dominance over rivals. Factions may attempt to improve their status and power

within a coalition using violence, while external factions may mobilize for inclusion, or to form a rival coalition. Furthermore, rent seeking may be premised on coercion and the threat of violence. Rather than being diametrically opposed, order and violence are therefore co-constitutive. It is in this sense that we can speak of violence and order as ‘inextricably intertwined’,¹⁹ of political violence as ‘*constitutive* of the political field rather than anomalous’ (italics in original),²⁰ and of violence as being not marginal but ‘integral’ to the political system.²¹ As Goldstein and Arias similarly argue, violence is ‘critical to the foundation of Latin American democracies, the maintenance of democratic states, and the political behavior of democratic citizens’.²²

The second way in which this framework informs our understanding of political violence is through contesting the empirical boundaries to the concept. Political violence is typically defined in relation to the state or government. Bourgois,²³ for example, defines ‘direct political violence’ as physical violence directed towards or in opposition to the state. Similarly, ‘contentious politics’ for Tilly,²⁴ ‘consists of discontinuous, public, collective claim making in which one of the parties is a government’. However, if political order is contingent on the balance of power across a coalition of actors organized throughout society, and on how this coalition extracts resources, then this suggests that violence specialists can be deeply embedded in people’s lives. As such, violence may permeate a far broader range of relationships that contribute to maintaining the power of actors within a ruling coalition, and ultimately form part of how political order at a societal level is maintained. When oriented around this understanding of political order, political violence can be seen as a continuum, with more extreme acts such as protests or bombings, sitting next to factional conflicts and everyday coercion perpetrated by ‘violence specialists’. While clearly different, such violence is united in that it is sustaining a particular form of political order.

Intermediation and ‘latent’ violence

The argument that political order is contingent on actors who can be deeply embedded in the lives of ordinary people in societies across South Asia, and that as such the concept of political violence has a far broader empirical application, can be deepened through considering more precisely the nature of these roles. While recognizing that violence specialists take many diverse and complex forms, it is also possible to point to some more general structural characteristics to their roles, which resonate empirically in South Asia and beyond, and can be linked to the framework of political order outlined above. Central to both the Limited Access Order framework and work on political settlements is that political order rests on the rent seeking of groups organized most fundamentally around violent factions within a ruling coalition. This raises the critical question of how such resources are controlled and extracted. The proposition here is that a prominent way in which such violence specialists extract rents from society is through operating as intermediaries or brokers (these terms are used here interchangeably). As Tilly argues, political entrepreneurs specialize in ‘activation, connection, coordination, and representation’.²⁵ Mediating

access to resources, often informally, can be a means by which individuals and groups accrue wealth, which may or may not be a primary motivation for their actions, but in any case is likely to be critical to maintaining a capacity for violence.

While the connection between intermediation and violence is under-theorized, literature from diverse contexts testifies as to how violent entrepreneurs use such relationships to gain wealth.²⁶ Empirically, intermediation can be described through a range of concepts, such as middlemen (often termed *dalal* in South Asia), political clientelism, protection racketeering and extortion. Because economic and political life are 'interlocked', there are no clear boundaries to the resources that such violent entrepreneurs can mediate access to, and while these differ between contexts, they can include housing, employment, security and public services. This is not to exaggerate empirically and make the claim that all forms of intermediation that people depend upon relate in this way to violence, but to suggest that there is a systemic relationship between violence specialists and intermediation, which varies in form across geographies and sectors. This argument suggests that rent seeking through intermediation is part of how political order is maintained and that as such the experience of intermediation can be highly coercive. Indeed, in some contexts, the individuals and groups who mediate access to important resources also organize more extreme acts of political violence²⁷.

Such relationships can also be described as violent even when violence is not directly physically inflicted. Violence, for example, is very often threatened but not used. As Tilly²⁸ writes, the 'genuinely effective specialist deploys threats of violence so persuasively that others comply before the damage begins'. There is also a case for suggesting that for violence to be real it neither has to be physically inflicted nor even threatened, but simply to be understood or recognized as a possibility. This is violence in the sense of coercion. Within Lukes²⁹ three dimensions of power framework, power in both the first and second dimensions refer to observable conflict, either making someone do something against their interests or the ability to control an agenda. The most potent form of power, the third dimension, draws attention away from observable conflict and towards the power to control preferences about what one does or does not want. According to this dimension, conflict is not necessarily manifest but can be 'latent'.³⁰ As he writes, 'the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place'.³¹ Building from this insight, a capability for violence can be conceptualized beyond the brute ability to use violence and refer to how such actors inculcate perceptions in others about what is or what is not possible, such that people adhere to their interests without violence being used, and without conflict being made manifest. This constitutes a form of coercion, and such violence can be understood as latent, underlying the relationships and phenomenon observed.³² A capability for violence can therefore be seen in the implicit understandings people maintain about the consequences of not adhering to the interests of violent entrepreneurs. Because political order rests on the roles of such violent entrepreneurs, then this latent violence can arguably be considered a form of political violence, suggesting a further layer of complexity to how this concept can be thought of and applied. In this sense, a society can retain a political order, while also being deeply violent.³³

Gangsters, political leaders and other violent entrepreneurs in South Asian cities

This section explores the approach outlined above empirically in South Asia, a region where there is no shortage of violent specialists. These include dacoit, militia, guerrilla groups, terrorists, political factions, trade unions, labor groups, vigilantes, community defense groups, mafia, gangsters, street gangs and then formal state bodies such as the military, police and paramilitary groups. The extent to which these actors are present in any particular area, their precise characters and roles, all vary considerably, as do the nature of their relationships with one another and with state authorities. The intention of this section is to demonstrate the empirical relevance of the arguments developed above, however given this variation it is important to confine our empirical scope. This section will therefore be limited to urban areas, particularly large cities, and focus on India, though with reference to neighboring countries. This naturally limits the violent entrepreneurs of relevance, and points away from guerrilla groups or militia, and towards mafia, gangsters and political parties. In line with the theoretical arguments made above, literature from diverse cities testify to the association between violence and intermediation at the community level; and to the complex and often close relationships such actors have with wider authorities including the state and political parties.

Life in South Asian cities – particularly for the poor – often requires dealing with locally powerful actors who mediate access to many of life's basics, such as somewhere to live, services, personal security and work opportunities. People engage with what Hansen³⁴ has termed the 'networks of strongmen, brokers and fixers [that] can be found in any neighborhood, slum and chawl in Indian cities'. Such intermediation differs, but examples include accessing government services on the basis of an informal fee, paying rent to a political leader to live on public land or paying protection money to run a business. Although formally illegal, studies have suggested that such arrangements are pervasive, and those who control them are very often violent and powerful, as well as closely connected to party politics and the state. Berenschot's³⁵ analysis of political mediation in Gujarat, for example, demonstrates how deeply entrenched such relationships can be, constituting not a marginal form of service delivery but being at 'the heart of the state'. In Karachi, Anwar³⁶ has described how for the urban poor access to land is controlled by 'brokers' or 'middlemen', who operate within a nexus including the police and politicians, and together constitute a land mafia, their role being so significant that it indicates the 'localized nature of sovereignty'.³⁷ In Dhaka, a complex web of intermediaries oriented around political leaders from different Awami League bodies control widespread extortion rackets, labor markets and housing.³⁸ The association between violence and intermediation is also prevalent in urban industries. Historical and contemporary analyses of the Textile Labour Association (TLA) in Ahmedabad,³⁹ an industrial town in Jharkland,⁴⁰ and industry in colonial Kolkata,⁴¹ for example, demonstrate the complex enmeshment between labor

intermediaries and violent entrepreneurs. In particular, these analyses highlight the role of *goonda*, local strongmen ready to mobilize either on behalf of labor groups or more likely in opposition to them at the behest of industrial leaders.

The notion of a *goonda* can be seen as a prominent way of highlighting the close connection between intermediation and violence across urban areas. The term *goonda* emerged in early 20th-century colonial discourse to denote a seemingly unique and particularly urban figure, associated with violent crime, and sometimes closely integrated into party politics and the state. The extent to which this discourse reflected a genuine shift in the presence and organization of urban violence is debatable,⁴² however it is clear that violent figures associated with the term played key roles in urban industries, illegal businesses such as prostitution, while maintaining often close relationships to the police, capitalists and political parties. *Goonda* have, for example, been identified as particularly important in the communal clashes of the 1940s.⁴³ At the grassroots level today, the term *goonda* continues to be associated with violent intermediaries controlling access to services, security and opportunities,⁴⁴ but also to actors pivotal in the operations of political parties, and as such inherent to the political networks which represent a primary way in which ruling coalitions are organized.⁴⁵ It has been argued that for politicians, *goonda* can help win elections, and 'be used to intimidate rivals, for personal protection, to threaten disputants into a settlement, to clear valuable land, etc.';⁴⁶ meanwhile *goonda* need protection from the police that political leaders can provide, on the basis of their power over the bureaucracy.⁴⁷ While it would clearly be unfair to characterize all political leaders in these terms, and the degree to which politicians rely on such actors clearly differ, it is also true that politics in India and more widely on the sub-continent has a particularly 'muscular' character, where *goonda* have become politicians, and political leaders are deeply associated with an ability to use violence.⁴⁸

An iconic form of urban violent entrepreneur, closely connected to the terms and forms described above, are gangsters or mafia. Post-independence, cities across the sub-continent saw a marked increase in violent and powerful groups, which became associated with the terms *mafia*, *godfather* and *don*. Perhaps the most well documented examples come from Mumbai, known both historically and today for infamous groups including the Pathan gang and D-Company, and gangsters such as Haji Mastan, Karim Lala and Dawood Ibrahim.⁴⁹ Such figures grew to have, or indeed still do have, international reach, famously funded Bollywood films and mingled with political and entertainment elites. The history of such violent entrepreneurs can be traced back to the 1950s, where small groups of mostly poor and young men associated with low-income settlements or organized labor ran petty extortion networks and organized thefts.⁵⁰ Gang leaders were known as *dadas*, and some rose to become extraordinarily wealthy, operating large-scale and hierarchically structured organizations, often incorporating many smaller groups. At the community level lower lying members of such groups have been closely associated with poor communities and mediating access to resources, for example through land-grabbing, extortion, controlling access to government services, alcohol production and

drug trafficking.⁵¹ Larger groups have even operated internationally in smuggling and the lucrative hawala network. Notorious gangsters such as those seen in Mumbai have been observed elsewhere, such as in Dhaka, Bangladesh, where groups associated with the name of their leader ran extortion rackets and illegal businesses through the 1990s until the early 2000s.

While often associated with brute violence and being outlaws in public imagination, in practice such gangsters have often operated in close collaboration with political parties and elements within the state. The nature of these inter-dependencies has differed, but often involved the assurance of legal protection and the delivery of resources and muscle for elections. In Mumbai, it has been argued such relationships intensified during the 1970s,⁵² with mafia groups funding political campaigns,⁵³ and with one prominent gangster even founding their own political party (Haji Mastan's 'Dalit Muslim Suraksha Mahasangh'). In Dhaka, gangsters provided muscle to the Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) through the 1990s until the early 2000s. The relationships between such gangsters and state authorities have also been highly complex and continuously negotiated. In certain periods there have been clear efforts by the state to eradicate such gangsters, for example through extrajudicial killings in Bangladesh in the early 2000s.⁵⁴

In practice, the similarities between political factions, their leaders, and mafia groups, can be so great that these boundaries are porous, and more a question of terminology and perception than distinct organizational form. Many established politicians have criminal records;⁵⁵ some have clearly been mafia or gang leaders, while others are associated more generally with the muscle, violence and criminality typical to low-level politics. Sanchez's description of his research site holds equally true of the dynamics portrayed here, 'criminality was inherent to the negotiations by which anyone accesses real power and wealth'.⁵⁶ This brief analysis has suggested that violence and intermediation are intimately related in the context of South Asian cities. While formally illegal, the roles of urban intermediaries organized through political parties or in the groups of infamous gangsters appear to form an important part of how political and economic relations are structured. Rather than undermining political order, such actors are often accommodated to achieve it. As Hansen describes similarly, 'while the local big man may challenge the authority of the bureaucracy at some junctures by bending the law, he may also be a useful partner in maintaining order and in creating legibility'.⁵⁷

Conclusion: a relational view of political violence

This chapter has argued that political order in South Asian societies is premised not on the monopolization of violence by a central state, but through a balance of power being maintained across a diverse range of violent entrepreneurs, organized throughout society. These actors compete on the basis of their capacity for violence, and seek status and inclusion within the ruling coalition, a network of actors that dominates society and accrues resources on this basis. A prominent way in which these violent entrepreneurs are embedded in the lives of ordinary people is through the phenomena of

intermediation. Factions require income to be maintained, and mediating access to resources represents a means by which such factions can sustain and build their power. The capacity for violence upon which the roles of these actors depends may not always be made manifest or result in physical coercion but can rather represent a latent form of violence which underpins their status and the relationships people have with them. Even if it implicit and unspoken, such relationships can be profoundly violent, and violence can define the terrain on which people relate to them.

This approach suggests that the relationships of intermediation on which people depend to access resources can be inherently connected to how political order is maintained. The everyday violence associated with such actors, as well the violent competition associated with factions trying to improve their status or compete with others, are examples of how this balance is being constantly maintained and negotiated. A core analytical implication of this framework is that it highlights the deep interconnections between what are conventionally seen as different forms of violence, and points to the need to study and examine the interplay between these rather than reinforce these categorizations.⁵⁸ The idea that political violence should be confined to actions emanating or directed towards the state or government breaks down once we recognize that political order is contingent on the balance of power across diverse violence specialists. Because political order depends on the roles of actors who are embedded throughout society, disrupting or challenging these relationships directly affects the nature of political order. This also suggests that the nature of political violence will differ between contexts, depending on the structure and organization of ruling coalitions. The relative power of gangsters, political leaders or the police, and the nature of their interconnections, all differ between societies and will result differently into forms of relational political violence, suggesting significant scope for comparative analysis.

Notes

- 1 Daniel Goldstein and Enrique Desmond Arias, *Violent democracies in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
- 2 Jonathan Spencer, *Anthropology, Politics, and the State: Democracy and Violence in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 137. As Spencer goes on to argue, the counterpoint to such a model of the state has been a Foucauldian notion of postcolonial governmentality, however this fails – so he argues – to account for the violence often seen in South Asian contexts.
- 3 Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Sovereigns beyond the state: on legality and public authority in India.' In *Religion, violence and political mobilisation in South Asia*, ed. Ravinder Kaur (Delhi: Sage publication, 2005), 170.
- 4 Martin Shaw, 'Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks for Organised Violence,' *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, no 3 (1) (2009).
- 5 Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud, *Order, Conflict, and Violence*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- 6 Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Mushtaq H. Khan, *Political Settlements and the Governance of Growth-Enhancing Institutions* (SOAS, 2010)

- 7 North et al use the broader term 'social order', however given the focus here 'political order' is preferred and used throughout this chapter.
- 8 Thank you to Joe Devine and Geof Wood for suggesting the use of this term.
- 9 Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Khan, *Political Settlements and the Governance*.
- 12 It is important to qualify my use of this work. The central concept adopted from North et al is the idea of a 'ruling coalition', which is useful for recognising the way in which violence specialists exist in mutually supportive relationships. It is recognised however that when applied empirically it can become highly complex to delineate who precisely sits 'within' or 'outside' coalitions, and that while clear in obvious cases, many actors appear to have a more complex relationship than this binary conception would suggest. Furthermore, in emphasising the structural significance of factions this is not to deny that violence is organised in alternative ways, motivated by ideology and ideas more than rent-seeking, nor to deny that political order is contingent on more than the organisation of violence specialists. A wider theoretical claim made in this work is that societies have two 'types' of social order, Limited and Open access, however this chapter does not engage with the analytical rigour or empirical relevance of this argument.
- 13 Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974). Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).
- 14 Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36.
- 15 Geof Wood, 'Can Civil Society be Free of the Natural State? Applying North to Bangladesh,' *Bath Papers in International Development and Wellbeing*, Working Paper No. 33
- 16 North, Wallis, and Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders*, 42.
- 17 Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 19.
- 18 Ibid. 40.
- 19 Kalyvas, Shapiro, and Masoud, *Order, Conflict, and Violence*, 14.
- 20 Itty Abraham, Edward Newman, Meredith L. Weiss, *Political violence in South and Southeast Asia: Critical Perspectives* (United Nations University Press, 2010).
- 21 Daniel Goldstein and Enrique Desmond Arias, *Violent democracies in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.
- 22 Ibid. 5.
- 23 Philippe Bourgois, 'The power of violence in war and peace. Post-cold war lessons from El Salvador,' *Ethnography*, no. 2(1) (2001), 5–34.
- 24 Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 9.
- 25 Ibid. 34.
- 26 Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974). Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002). Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*. David Jackman, 'Living in the shade of others: intermediation, politics and violence in Dhaka city' (PhD diss., University of Bath, 2017).
- 27 Jackman, 'Living in the shade of others: intermediation, politics and violence in Dhaka city.'
- 28 Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 36.
- 29 Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*. 2nd ed, (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan)
- 30 Ibid. 28.
- 31 Ibid. 27.
- 32 This is not however to make the reductionist claim that violence is the sole characteristic on which the power of such actors rests. A capacity for violence is intertwined with a host of other characteristics – for example, charisma, knowledge, networks, ideology, wisdom,

- access to resources, friendship, trustworthiness, financial services and so on – which together constitute authority and power.
- 33 When violence is consolidated and monopolized centrally, a society can of course still be highly coercive in the sense described here, although the source and dynamics of this are likely to differ.
- 34 Hansen, 'Sovereigns beyond the state,' 185.
- 35 Ward Berenschot, 'Everyday Mediation: The Politics of Public Service Delivery in Gujarat, India,' *Development and Change*, 41 (5) (2010): 902.
- 36 Nausheen H. Anwar, 'Urban transformations: brokers, collaborative governance and community building in Karachi's periphery,' *South Asian History and Culture*, 5 (1) (2014): 75–92.
- 37 Ibid, 76.
- 38 Jackman, 'The decline of gangsters and politicization of violence in urban Bangladesh,' online early view (2018).
- 39 Rukmini Barua, 'The Textile Labour Association and Dadagiri: Power and Politics in the Working Class Neighborhoods of Ahmedabad,' *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 87 (2015): 63–91.
- 40 Andrew Sanchez, *Criminal Capital: violence, corruption and class in industrial India*, (Routledge, 2016).
- 41 Arup Kumar Sen, 'Mode of Labour Control in Colonial India,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, no. 37 (38) (2002): 3956–3966.
- 42 Sugata Nandi, 'Constructing the Criminal: Politics of Social Imaginary of the "Goonda",' *Social Scientist*, no. 38 (3/4) (2010): 37–54.
- 43 Suranjan Das, "'The 'Goondas': Towards a Reconstruction of the Calcutta Underworld through Police Records,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29 (44) (1994): 2877–2879.
- 44 Berenschot, 'Everyday Mediation: The Politics of Public Service Delivery in Gujarat, India.'
- 45 Mushtaq H. Khan, *Political Settlements and the Governance of Growth-Enhancing Institutions* (SOAS, 2010).
- 46 Ward Berenschot, 'Rioting as Maintaining Relations: Hindu-Muslim Violence and Political Mediation in Gujarat, India,' *Civil Wars*, no. 11 (4) (2009): 423.
- 47 Ward Berenschot, 'On the Usefulness of Goondas in Indian Politics: "Moneypower" and "Musclepower" in a Gujarati Locality,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 34 (2) (2011): 255–275.
- 48 Lucia Michelutti, 'Kinship without Kings in Northern India,' In *Patronage as politics in South Asia* edited by Anastasia Piliavsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 283–302. Milan Vaishnav, *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics* (Yale University Press, 2017).
- 49 Weinstein distinguishes large crime groups from *goonda* in Mumbai, and argues that *goonda* increasingly work together with the state to facilitate slum clearances.
- 50 Liza Weinstein, 'Mumbai's Development Mafias: Globalization, Organized Crime and Land Development,' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32 (1) (2008), 22–39. Vijay Raghavan, 'Criminal gangs in Mumbai city: from actor to network orientation,' in *Business Standard India* (New Delhi: BS Books, 2012), 252–268.
- 51 Weinstein, 'Mumbai's Development Mafias: Globalization, Organized Crime and Land Development,' 22–39. S. Hussain Zaidi, *Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia* (Lotus, 2012).
- 52 Weinstein, 'Mumbai's Development Mafias: Globalization, Organized Crime and Land Development,' 22–39.
- 53 Molly Charles, 'The growth and activities of organised crime in Bombay,' *International Social Science Journal*, 53(169) (2001): 359–367. Vijay Raghavan, 'Criminal gangs in Mumbai city: from actor to network orientation,' in *Business Standard India* (New Delhi: BS Books, 2012), 252–268.
- 54 Jackman, 'The decline of gangsters and politicization of violence in urban Bangladesh,' *Development and Change*, online early view (2018).

- 55 Milan Vaishnav, *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics* (Yale University Press, 2017).
- 56 Ibid, 71.
- 57 Hansen, 'Sovereigns beyond the state: on legality and public authority in India.' In *Religion, violence and political mobilisation in South Asia*, ed. Ravinder Kaur (Sage publication, 2005), 190.
- 58 Martin Shaw, 'Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks for Organised Violence,' *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, no 3 (1) (2009).

3

REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIAN ENGLISH FICTION

Fahmida Zaman

Introduction

Whether it is the war in Kashmir, the ongoing Naxal insurgencies in India, or the social and electoral unrests in Bangladesh, political violence is a common denominator in South Asian political discourse. As such it is significant to analyze not only how the state and its political actors contextualize political violence but also how individual agencies are altered due to the violence. To do so, combined considerations of the terms “political violence” and “fiction” have not been the norm. Although they fall within two contiguous research fields, each employing disparate theoretical frameworks, methodological tools, and sets of questions,¹ there are compelling reasons for exploring the themes of political violence in South Asian fictions. For example, contemporary writings can provide a distinctive opportunity to contextualize individual and personal struggles of the characters within South Asian political contexts that can often be incorporated into the larger national and international political struggle. While one must use caution when using small samples of literature, it is undeniable that contemporary South Asian authors are revisiting the histories and agencies of violence in the region through their fiction. This chapter aims to provide an overview of fictional works by South Asian writers in English from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh suggesting that fiction can represent current anxieties about oppression and inequality in the authors’ respective societies.

Overview of South-Asian literature

The South Asian fictional imaginations have been reshaped by not only post-Cold War historical and cultural changes² but also by rapid changes in the economy and politics. For example, in Pakistan, the ‘global ramifications of the “war on terror” along with the history of military rule and economic and religio-political shifts over the past 25 years³

have occupied a significant space in the country's literary representation. Conversely, the 'war on terror' is a recurrent theme in the fictional writings of Afghani authors. In India, sustained economic growth and rapid urban-societal developments transformed the production and consumption of fiction. In particular, the older patterns of consumption that catered to a 'double audience' at home and abroad⁴ have been supplemented by a new readership for popular English fiction published specially for the Indian market.⁵ In Sri Lanka, the long running and collectively traumatizing civil conflict, which ended in 2009 as well as the natural disaster of the 2004 tsunami have generated extended literary reaction.⁶ Similarly, in Bangladesh, the region's youngest nation, the shared subjective legacies of the 1971 liberation war have dominated the literary imaginations in English.

In recent years, with the spread of literary festivals across South Asia and new online literary journals, and through continued endorsement from international literary prizes,⁷ South Asian fiction has boosted its visibility both regionally and globally. However, the recent literacy statistics for South Asian countries show that in Pakistan and Bangladesh, just over half the adult population, 56% in each case, is literate, compared with 63% in India and 91% in Sri Lanka.⁸ These numbers do not reflect the English literacy rate, which is much smaller. As a result, in South Asia, buying and reading fiction in English is still very much the preserve of the elite. Another critical consideration of the nature of South Asian fiction writers in English is the authors' locations as South Asian fiction is not always published by authors who are residents of the subcontinent. Arguably, a greater number of internationally recognized South Asian authors have lived or continue to live in North America and Europe which warns the readers to be aware of the:

often-fraught politics of authenticity that attends the authorial choice of whether to live and write in South Asia (and thus retain a 'contemporary' representational claim to a country of origin, albeit in English), or to live peripatetically between different locations, usually in North America, Europe and South Asia, and assume a more 'cosmopolitan' literary persona.⁹

Considering the limited scope of the chapter, it focuses on providing an overview of literary representations of political violence in South Asian fictional imagination rather than a collective report on the literary history of the present and interpretative range of South Asian writings. It brings attention to the representation of different forms of political violence in the already well known and critically acclaimed English fictions from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The chapter identifies four broader categories of representation of political violence in South Asian fiction. The first category offers an overview of fiction that deals with the 1947 Partition violence. These novels are written primarily by Indian and Pakistani writers. The second category summarizes fictional response, predominantly from Pakistan and Afghanistan, to the 'war on terror' in the wake of 9/11. The third category sheds lights on violence by non-state actors with a particular focus on fictional representation of Naxal insurgency in India. The fourth category highlights writings from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, where the literary imagination of the countries has dealt with the history-altering violent wars.

Violence and post-colonial memories

One of the most persistent concerns of South Asian literature from India and Pakistan is the 1947 Partition violence as well as the violence perpetuated afterwards. Haunted by the memories of a brutal Partition, these authors depicted the violent response to the Partition and the violations of the rights of citizens in the postcolonial nation-states. The most iconic of the Partition novels is Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*.¹⁰ Although it is the first Partition novel to be published in English, critics across five decades unanimously agree on the power and popularity of the novel.¹¹ The communal violence that erupted during the Partition has been frequently highlighted in fiction, but perhaps nowhere more vividly than in *Train to Pakistan*. In the novel, a tiny sleepy village on the frontier between India and Pakistan suddenly wakes up to unprecedented violence and horror on the eve of the Partition.

Sikhs and Muslims, who had for generations lived peaceably together as 'brothers,' can no longer trust each other after they are made to burn a trainload of dead Sikhs, and Muslims are threatened with retaliation. However, in *Train to Pakistan*, the violence is represented in a unique way because there is no detailed description of the violence happening. There is not even a reported description of the incidents in the novel. But readers are only informed of the aftermath of the violence: a trainload of dead bodies (all of them Sikhs) comes from Pakistan at the beginning, and it is decided that a trainload of dead (all of them Muslims) should go over to Pakistan. Only, in the latter case, this is prevented at the last minute by the cunning of one man and the sacrifice of another.

Though not as popular among the readers as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, the Maharashtrian author Manohar Malgonkar's novel, *A Bend in the Ganges*¹² has been extensively studied by critics. Malgonkar shows how the initial clash between Indian Nationalism and British Imperialism gave way to communalism in the last phase of British rule in India. Friends and neighbors became enemies virtually overnight, and Gandhi's 'non-violent' India suddenly seemed to delight and indulge in an orgy of violence.¹³ What distinguishes *A Bend in the Ganges* from other Partition novels is that it is not a novel about the violence that erupted at the time of the Partition. Instead, Malgonkar explores 'the philosophy of violence as propounded by the terrorist moment, where violence was used not as an instrument of revenge but employed as a political strategy by a subject nation to achieve a positive political goal.'¹⁴ The novelist illustrates how the emphasis from the struggle between Indian nationalism and British colonialism shifted unfortunately to the furious and malicious communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims. The double conflict, thus, led to dual impacts of freedom and the division of the country, and before it happened a hell was let loose in many provinces of the nation.

Continuing the trajectory of violence and memories of the Partition, *The Shadow Lines*¹⁵ by Amitav Ghosh is one of few novels that not only deals exclusively with the aftermath of the Partition, but also with the Partition on the Bengal border. The novel depicts the far-reaching violent consequences of the

Partition, even two generations after the event, through a crucial incident in 1964 when the protagonist's uncle falls victim to a rioting mob's fury in Dhaka. *The Shadow Lines* focuses on the absurdity of the Partition and its ability to unleash endless ripples of violence. Amitav Ghosh is also concerned in his other novel, *The Hungry Tide*, with the products of a violent past as they examine the continual refugee problem and the long-standing unresolved issues of post-Partitioned sub-continental politics. In particular, *In The Hungry Tide*,¹⁶ he uncovers the suppressed history of the desperately poor and wretched refugees of Morichjhapi who were massacred by the West Bengal government in 1979. In both of his novels, Ghosh pits the memory of communal riots during the Partition and brutality against the marginalized in the subcontinent against the documented history of its violence.

Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*¹⁷ move beyond exploring communal violence and mass migration—the immediate physical consequences of the Partition and focuses on the ideas about nationhood. *Midnight's Children* is perhaps the most critically acclaimed and internationally recognized South Asian fiction, winning the Brooker Prize, “Booker of Bookers” in 1993, and again, the prize for the best Booker of 40 years in 2008.¹⁸ The novel portrays how the protagonist's personal story becomes interlinked with the three partitioned states of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The novel is uniquely different from other Partition novels because it is the only novel that depicts not only the Partition of 1947 but also the atrocities of the West Pakistani army against those in the East in 1971. Rushdie's portrayal of violence is most significant in two disparate yet interlinked chapters: in Chapter 2 of Book I, entitled ‘Mercurochrome,’ with one of the worst massacres in Indian history at Jallianwalabagh in April 1919 when General Dyer opened fire on an unarmed crowd, and in Chapters 24–26, with a defining civil war on the Indian subcontinent in 1971.

But, the two cases are portrayed differently. There is a kind of distancing in the first instance against the graphic description of violence in the latter, which is not only horrific but also nauseating. ‘Mercurochrome’ depicted a colonial power's brutal assertion of its authority when threatened with concerted opposition.¹⁹ In his essay, *The Roots of Religious Violence in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, Sumit Ganguly, tracing the sources of conflict in these post-colonial nations, argues that ‘in polyethnic societies, ethno-religious conflict and violence is more likely when states lack a commitment to ethno-religious pluralism, to the protection of minority rights, and to democratic procedures.’²⁰ The Bangladesh chapters in Rushdie's novel exemplify a war against not an external foe but a war with one's own people.

The violence of the 1947 Partition and its aftermath are depicted through the individual and collective memories of the characters in South Asian fiction. Hence, it is not unusual for South Asian authors to paint the individual or collective sufferings caused by a catastrophic event, near or far, in their writings. As such 9/11 has been a recurrent theme in Pakistani and Afghani fiction in English.

The global violence: Af-Pak fictions in the wake of 9/11

South Asian fiction, particularly novels from Afghanistan and Pakistan, rose to prominence on the global literary map after the 9/11 attack in 2001. These novels written by authors with a Pakistani or Afghani background, but who live, or have lived, in the global North and write for a transnational audience, politicized their setting in the contemporary period. The geopolitical context of 9/11 brought international attention to writers of the Af-Pak region such as Mohammed Hanif, Mohsin Hamid, Aamer Hussein, Nadeem Aslam, Khaled Hosseini, and Kamila Shamsie. After the attacks on the US Pentagon and World Trade Center on 9/11, the wars prosecuted by the US and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq brought about a regional compression, and implicated Pakistan in a neighboring conflict.²¹ The events of 9/11 also fostered attitudes on Islam, and on Muslim societies in Afghanistan and Pakistan that were both reified and challenged by popular novels such as *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini,²² *The Wasted Vigil*,²³ and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.²⁴ Nevertheless, one must be cautious of this phenomenon in the wake of 9/11 as the Pakistani writer Bina Shah wonders ‘whether violence and “terror” have become “sexy to Western readers” implicating some writers in a “cold-blooded consideration of market trends.”’²⁵ *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *The Wasted Vigil* by Nadeem Aslam, and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini are some of the critically acclaimed novels that are shaped by the 2001 Al-Qaeda attack on New York’s twin towers and the subsequent US military presence in the Af-Pak region.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is the second novel by Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid. In the novel, Hamid illustrates the complexity of identity in the age of globalization, and the mistrust between East and West after the events of 9/11 and the different forms of fundamentalism and terrorism in the 21st century. His protagonist presents his interpretation of the rhetoric of the war on terrorism by highlighting the selectivity involved in the labelling of violence as terroristic only if the violence is not condoned by the states.²⁶ The representation of violence in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is unique because the main characters do not commit any acts of physical violence. In fact, the novel refers to the terrorist or terrorism on only two occasions. First, when the narrator mentions to the American auditor that he should not imagine that all Pakistani are ‘terrorists,’ and second when the narrator refers to America’s ‘war on terrorism.’ What makes the novel unique in studying violence is that the novel raises a philosophical debate about 21st-century economic practices as themselves fundamentalist, leading to issues of paranoia, mistrust and policies of state-terrorism. As such violence is not a characteristic of the characters but a consequence of humiliation or betrayal when it does occur, and a moral choice.²⁷

The Wasted Vigil, an acclaimed novel by British-Pakistani author Nadeem Aslam illustrates the multifaceted conflict in Afghanistan. The novel explores the long history of invasion in the region that is now Afghanistan and how the proxy war

between the United States and the Soviet Union created the conditions that bred Muslim radical groups such as the Taliban and warring tribal factions. The novel, informs its readers early on, that hatred and wars have destabilized the country and killed over two million people. Although the novel does not blame one party for the violence in the country, it is important to note that the novel has done little to rectify existing problem of representation. Gopal notes that ‘when it comes to the Taliban as ideological warriors whose “cruelty and degradation” we need not equivocate about, the novel indulges in something very close to a pornography of violence while the death and destruction inflicted by, for instance, American drone-bombing is alluded to at best in notional ways.’²⁸

Another critically acclaimed 9/11 novel from the Af-Pak region is *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. Although the novel mentions 9/11 only in passing, it is clearly shaped by the catastrophic event. Indeed, violence is embodied by the characters, as Assef is a terrorist figure representing the fissure between the protagonist, Amir, and Afghanistan as well as the enemy of his new American home in the impending ‘war on terror.’ Assef, thus, exemplifies the oppression and violence by the Taliban, allowing Amir to embody the American anti-terrorism battle and to adopt the protective and liberating role to the protagonist’s childhood friend, Sohrab.²⁹ Moreover, Hosseini uses the characters of his novel as analogous for ethnic tensions within Afghanistan, where Assef’s rape of Hassan links to the disempowerment of the Hazara group to which Hassan belongs.³⁰ This domination through sexual discourse by Assef can also be seen not only in the rape of Hassan but also the sexual abuse of his son Sohrab. The film version of *The Kite Runner* created tension around the depiction of Hassan’s rape, where the point of discomfort ‘is not the celluloid rape of a male child. It is the vision, celluloid or otherwise, of sexual violence against a member of one ethnic group – in this case, the Hazara, who are mostly Shi’a Muslims – by his historical oppressor, namely, a Shunni Pahstun.’³¹

The writers of Af-Pak fiction in the wake of 9/11 have sought explicitly to question the political and cultural discourse of this region to the rest of the world, particularly the West. While the sole responsibility of fiction authors is not to ‘represent’ their societies of origin, Hamid, Aslam, and Hosseini in their novels have scrutinized the agencies of global violence in the Af-Pak region. For example, the physical and psychological violence in *The Kite Runner* is exemplified through individual trauma but is emblematic of the collective sufferings of the ‘war on terror.’ In both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Wasted Vigil*, the readers learn that the ‘war on terror’ is ‘better understood as and termed a “war of terror” with more than one party, including NATO and the US, deploying indefensible violence against civilians.’³² The attack on 9/11 and the subsequent events have shaped the narratives in these novels. They have rightly illustrated that the states, non-state actors, and individuals are both victims and perpetrators of violence in the wake of 9/11. However, in South Asia, the political violence towards and by the state, non-state actors, and individuals are not confined to the Af-Pak region only.

Violence by non-state actors: the Naxal movement in India

The present 'Naxal' Maoist uprising in India can be traced to the late 1960s. Inspired by Mao Zedong's 1927 'Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,' veteran communist activists, revolutionary minded students, and exploited peasants attacked oppressive landlords, redistributed their land to the landless, cancelled outstanding debts, and tried to end intergenerational bondage.³³ Thus, following Mao's strategy, they sought to lead an armed guerrilla war that, beginning in the countryside, would mobilize the peasantry and eventually encircle the cities in a bid to capture state power in the struggle for a communist society.³⁴ Though the initial uprisings were violently repressed by 1972 as law enforcement agencies openly resorted to gangster vigilantism, mass imprisonment, and torture, it saw a resurgence in 2004, after the formation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) group. The movement now occupies a 'red corridor' in central Indian states that include Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.³⁵

A body of literature has emerged from, and in response to, Indian Maoism. Some of this literature has come from within the movement itself: cadres carry pamphlets and songbooks, and fellow travelers have written plays, films, poems, and ballads in several Indian languages. Among the movement's bards are the eminent Telugu Marxist poets Varavara Rao and Gaddar, both of whom have acted as spokespersons for the Maoists, even as their writings have earned them international acclaim.³⁶ A parallel body of literature, from outside looking in, has also offered a glimpse of agencies and victims of the Naxal movement.³⁷ These 'Naxal Novels'³⁸ include Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*³⁹ and most recently, Neel Mukherjee's novel *The Lives of Others*.⁴⁰ Both Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* and Neel Mukherjee's *Lives of Others* revolve around a Bengali, urban, middle-class family affected by Naxal violence.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*, features urban middle-class protagonists, one of whom joins the Naxal movement by empathizing with the victims of institutionalized violence by the powerful.⁴¹ Lahiri considers Udayan's death as the ultimate outcome of the Naxal movement and turns her attention to the effects of Udayan's death on the three generations of their family. Lahiri gives the readers no insight into the political motivations of the Naxal movement, thus the readers have no understanding of the wider social context that compels Udayan to join the movement. On the other hand, Mukherjee's protagonist is inspired by the contradictions and contrasts he faces between the wealth of his household and the poverty of those he lives among as a Naxal. Mukherjee's novel depicts the lives of the protagonist's Bengali middle-class family and his experience as a Naxal activist and life in the rural areas where he is mobilizing peasants.

Mukherjee ends the book with present-day Maoists setting a landmine under a train in Jharkhand in what is represented as a terrorist attack. As Amitav Ghosh argues in his review of the book, 'what Neel chooses to celebrate about Supratik's [the protagonist] life is not the transmission of a spirit of resistance—something that is more than ever necessary at a time when the environment and the poor are

being subjected to devastating violence in the name of “growth”—but rather a particular means of resisting: in this instance a technique of mass murder.⁴² Lahiri, for her part, is unambiguous in her condemnation of the violence carried out by both the state and its guerrilla opponents. Both the state and the Naxal movement, in Lahiri’s portrayal, were equally violent and they carried out gruesome violence. The real victim, thus, are neither the state nor the participants of the movement, but the generations which had to live the consequences.

Arundhati Roy, the author best known for her Booker prize-winning 1997 novel *The God of Small Things*, whose protagonist is an untouchable carpenter accused of being a Naxal, is one of a handful of outsiders who have sought to see the conflict through the rebels’ eyes. *Walking with the Comrades*,⁴³ although not fiction,⁴⁴ is a powerful account of the two weeks the author spent with the guerrilla army in what the media calls the ‘Red Corridor.’⁴⁵ Roy observes, ‘Here in the forests of Dantewada a battle rages for the soul of India.’⁴⁶ On one side of the conflict there are Maoists fighting alongside the Adivasis, who ‘have been mercilessly exploited for decades, consistently cheated by small businessmen and moneylenders, the women raped as a matter of right by police and forest department personnel.’⁴⁷ On the other side of the battle are the government’s paramilitary forces joined by a state-sponsored ‘vigilante’ army comprised of tribal population called Salwa Judum, which translates to ‘Purification Hunt.’⁴⁸ These state-sponsored groups unleashed sheer terror—killing, raping, and burning their way through hundreds of villages, forcing many members of tribes to turn to the Maoists for protection, thus ratcheting up the violence.⁴⁹

In the novels by Lahiri and Mukherjee, the middle-class protagonists are impelled by a sense of justice and moral outrage to achieve an ‘enchanted solidarity’ with the Naxal movement.⁵⁰ Lahiri and Mukherjee’s books are aimed at a liberal readership who would like to see such a movement as extremist. What is significantly missing in both novels’ perspectives of understanding of how the Naxals have attracted so many peasants and Adivasis⁵¹ into their movement and the complexities, nuances, and contradictions that have played out in their lives because of the movement. Roy’s non-fictional account of the movement in *Walking with the Comrades*, thus plays a significant role in understanding the representation of violence in India.⁵²

The war violence: memories and continued sufferings

The fragmented and painful nature of individual and communal memories of the war are the defining themes in the literary imagination of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The multiple stories and memories of the characters of the novels by writers of both countries weave between past and present. Their literary account of the conflict helps the readers to rethink and interrogate the dominant narratives of war and violence in their respective societies. However, unlike other South Asian countries considered in this chapter, the literary landscape in Bangladesh is yet to flourish.

Kaiser Haq, a prominent Bangladeshi English-language poet, in an interview conducted in 1977 and published in 1998 asserted that no one can 'envisage an Anglophone literary community evolving' in that country because '[i]ndividual Bangladeshis [are] still trying to write English work[s] in isolation.'⁵³ Decades later, Haq's prediction for the future of English-language literary production in Bangladesh still seems to hold true. This point about isolation speaks to the lack of venues, including publishing houses, through which Bangladeshi authors using English could gain audiences for their work.⁵⁴ However, with the 2012 entrance onto the publishing scene of *Bengal Lights*, Khademul Islam's new literary online and print magazine, the recent launch of Bengal Lights Books in 2014 and regular literary festivals beginning in 2013, one may hope that Bangladeshi English production will contribute to an Anglophone literary community.⁵⁵ The question of the state of English language fiction in Bangladesh also brings up a related point: the status of English as a language in the country. The language politics within Bangladesh before and after the liberation war affected education policy and have later shaped the production and audience of English-language literature.

In Kaiser Haq's view, the rise of East Pakistani/Bangladeshi nationalism, which focused on regional and linguistic specifics as to distinguish itself from the dominant Pakistani nationalism promulgated by what was then West Pakistan, significantly and deliberately foregrounds Bangla and that language's centuries-old literary tradition as part of its collective identity.⁵⁶ Further, this linguistic nationalism, 'linked' as it is to Bangladesh's independence, resulted in English 'almost disappear[ing] from higher education; for a while not even elite schools were allowed to use English as a medium of instruction.'⁵⁷ However, over the decades English medium schools have mushroomed up in many places in the capital. Since English medium education is very expensive, it is generally the upper class of the society who can afford such education. With more than 50 percent of people living below the poverty line, an English medium education has become a sign of status and prestige. Thus, with creative ventures in English, the readership is limited to the elite. In that limited fictional imagination in English, the representations of the 1971 war reflect on the violence of the war whose memories still loom large upon the nation.

Memories and persisting trauma of the 1971 liberation war and its legacies occupy a significant space in the literary imagination of the contemporary Bangladeshi fiction writers such as Niaz Zaman, K. Anis Ahmed and Tahmima Anam. However, the most internationally well-known novels by a Bangladeshi writer are *A Golden Age*⁵⁸ and *The Good Muslim*.⁵⁹ *The Good Muslim* continues the story first seeded in the previous novel, *A Golden Age*, by Tahmima Anam.⁶⁰ Anam's novels attempt to depict the characters struggling with persisting trauma of the conflict and disappointment towards reconciliation in the new country focusing on the stories about faith and family shadowed by a war. The family in the novel, in particular the brother and sister, that has taken an active part in the war of independence has to face the challenges of reconciliation.

Decades after the war, they are completely transformed as the sister carries on the same revolutionary zeal, but the brother has resorted to religiosity in its puritanical form. They have charted their own ways, opposite to each other's ideologies, of moving forward in the shadow of the tortuous history. The brother's

embracing of a conservative version of Islam represented by the Tablighi Jamaat, which shuns the joyful life filled with music, friends, and liberal values, also indicate the changes in the country. Thus, Anam's novels explore the possibility of how a country's 'secularist nationalism,' that led to the separation from the Islamist West Pakistan, contends with the influx of 'religious nationalism' embodied in the brother's changed views. The novels give a human face to a nation's tumultuous history. The legacy of war and how individual lives are affected opens a window to human psychology and behavior in different and contrasting hues.⁶¹ The war with Pakistan, then West Pakistan, that led to the formation of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation, was a traumatic experience that played havoc with the lives of many in the newly-formed country. Four decades after the monumental year, 1971, the memories of war are still haunting the nation.

If recent writings about Bangladesh return ambivalently to the 1971 liberation war, Sri Lankan fiction is also dominated by memories of conflict and 'appears to be haunted by the "ghosts" of its warring past.'⁶² Twenty-six years of armed conflict have cost the small island nation 80–100,000 lives and indelibly marked the country's political terrain. The uneasy legacy of the conflict between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), which lasted from 1983 to 2009, has prompted formal interrogations of collective memory in novels.⁶³ In July 1983, the funeral of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers killed by the LTTE in Jaffna sparked the horrific spate of state-sanctioned murder of Tamil citizens and burning of Tamil-owned homes and businesses in the capital and elsewhere.⁶⁴ 'Black July' became the turning point for both the civil war and Sri Lankan creative writing. Shyam Selvadurai's debut novel *Funny Boy*⁶⁵ masterfully portrays the brutal effects of the ethnic conflict and of sexual awakening. The protagonist, the young gay Tamil narrator, becomes increasingly aware of his own sexuality as well as the family conflicts, political realities, and ethnic polarization.

When these tensions erupt in the anti-Tamil violence of July 1983, the protagonist's grandparents are burnt to death when their car is set alight. His family home is violated and he and his family go into hiding before migrating. Upheavals in the personal sphere merge with wider upheaval: family, home and nation become uninhabitable by the end of the novel.⁶⁶ Tackling the same event of 1983, V. V. Ganeshanathan's debut novel *Love Marriage*⁶⁷ dramatizes the *transnational* dimensions of what is often misunderstood as a highly localized ethnic civil war. The novel depicts the diasporic protagonist's globe-scattered extended Sri Lankan Tamil family, emphasizes the role of the diasporic Tamil Tigers from the 1970s and the critique of the global network of diasporic Tiger money-laundering and drug-dealing in cities like Toronto.⁶⁸ In his novel *Anil's Ghost*,⁶⁹ Michael Ondaatje, perhaps Sri Lanka's most well-known diasporic writer, engages with the 'Sinhalese insurgency against the government in the South in the late 1980s the state's counter-terrorism and the rise of the Sri Lankan state as violent and corrupt.'⁷⁰ Ondaatje illustrates that the ordinary people are caught between the anti-government insurgents, separatists, and the government's forces against both. Neither of these groups are concerned consequences ordinary citizens have endured due to the violence

Conclusion

Both inter-state and intra-state violence have shaped the nature of the region's political environment, making political violence a common feature of South Asian political discourse. As such it is significant to analyze not only how the state and its political actors contextualize political violence but also how individual agencies are altered. Fiction can provide a distinctive opportunity to do so because in fiction individual and personal struggles of the characters within political contexts are often incorporated into the larger political struggle. The literary texts by South Asian fiction writers in English hold a paradigmatic value to examine the representation of political violence in South Asia, as the durations of these stories span several decades and address the genealogy of social unrest in one form or another. They allow us to engage retrospectively with overarching narratives regarding identity and remembrance not only within the country's borders but also beyond them. This overview of fiction by South Asian writers in English illustrates how power and violence pervade all levels of life, from the public to the intimate. Consequently, the literary imagination also deals with private forms of retaliation for political crimes or injustices, expressing a deep-seated incredulity toward national and international justice and highlighting the flipside of traumatized memories in Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Bangladeshi societies.

Notes

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- 12 Manohar Malgonkar, *A Bend in the Ganges* (Viking Press, 1965).
- 13 Roy, "South Asian partition fiction in English," 24.
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- 15 Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2010).
- 16 Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2004).
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- 19 The available facts and figures regarding the massacre at Jallianwalabagh are not uniform. According to Dominique Lappierre and Larry Collins in *Freedom at Midnight* (1976), for instance, "For twenty full minutes, while the trapped Indians screamed for mercy, the

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 - 33 Alpa Shah, and Dhruv Jain, "Naxalbari at its Golden Jubilee: Fifty recent books on the Maoist movement in India," *Modern Asian Studies Journal*, 51, no. 4 (2017): 1–39.
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 - 36 Nina Martyris, "The Naxal Novel," *Dissent* 61, 4 (2014): 38–44.
 - 37 However, the Naxal movement's defining fiction is Mahasweta Devi's 1974 novella *Mother of 1084*, in which Devi masterfully depicts the private sufferings of a public violence. In the novel, it is the violence perpetrated by the state that helps the upper-class, apolitical mother of Corpse No. 1084 understand what drove her beloved twenty-year-old son to become a Naxal. In a harrowing scene at the police morgue, she reaches out to caress his bludgeoned face only to find no skin to lay her fingers on. Slowly she realizes why he had lost faith in the system into which he was born, a system epitomized by his corrupt father. *Mother of 1084* is a grisly index of the excesses to which India resorted to crush the rebellion (Martyris, 2014). Yet it makes no mention of Naxal brutality, and "the movement" is referred to only abstractly.
 - 38 Martyris, "The Naxal Novel," 38–44.
 - 39 Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
 - 40 Neel Mukherjee, *The Lives of Others* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2014).
 - 41 Malreddy, "Solidarity," 223.
 - 42 Amitav Ghosh, "Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others*: a review," <http://amitavghosh.com/blog/?p=6400> (accessed 27 November 2017).
 - 43 Arundhati Roy, *Walking with the Comrades* (New Delhi: Hamish Hamilton, 2011).
 - 44 Although *Walking with the Comrades* is not a fiction, the book is included in this chapter because it is one of the few accounts in English by an outside writer that depicted the conflict through the rebels' eyes.

- 45 The “Red Corridor” is the areas in central Indian states, that include Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, occupied by CPI-Maoist group.
- 46 Roy, “Walking with the Comrades.”
- 47 Roy, “Walking with the Comrades.”
- 48 Shah and Jain, “*Naxalbari at its Golden Jubilee*,” 3.
- 49 Martyris, “The Naxal Novel,” 41.
- 50 Malreddy, “Solidarity,” 219.
- 51 Adivasis are India’s tribal people, seen as the original inhabitants—the aboriginal populations of the country—and officially called Scheduled Tribes by the Indian government.
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- 57 Falrul Alam, “Imagining South Asian writing in English from Bangladesh,” *South Asian Review* 27, no. 1 (2007): 37–49.
- 58 Tahmima Anam, *A Golden Age* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007).
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- 63 Ranasinha, “Sri Lanka,” 82.
- 64 Ranasinha, “Sri Lanka,” 83.
- 65 Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny boy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).
- 66 Ranasinha, “Sri Lanka,” 87.
- 67 V. V. Ganeshanathan, *Love marriage* (London: Phoenix, 2009).
- 68 Ganeshanathan, *Love marriage*, 254.
- 69 Michael Ondaatje, *Anil’s ghost* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2000).
- 70 Ranasinha, “Sri Lanka,” 92.

4

EXPLAINING POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY BANGLADESH (2001–2017)

Saimum Parvez

Political violence is one of the major features of the political landscape of Bangladesh. Right after its independence, Bangladesh experienced violent dissents from the radical leftists that were fiercely suppressed by the government. From 1975–1991, the country endured several military coups and counter-coups, assassinations of two heads of state, repression by the autocratic rulers, and violent protests against the regimes. After returning to parliamentary democracy in 1991, it was hoped that Bangladesh would witness vibrant and peaceful politics. However, that hope faded away with the bitter animosity between major political parties and their leaderships' 'zero-sum' mentality of acquiring and retaining power. The acrimonious relations have not been limited only to verbal accusations and blame games, but have led to violent strikes, roadblocks, targeted killings, and skirmishes. Hence, re-occurring violence in the politics of Bangladesh is not sporadic, but a regular and defining factor. Over the years, the trend of using violence to secure political gains has reached a certain point where it nearly acquired social acceptability, if not legal acceptability. The multifaceted manifestation of political violence has made it difficult to explain for the researchers, and agonizing to endure for the people of Bangladesh.

Although the extant literature examines the trends, patterns, and manifestations of political violence in Bangladesh, the explanations are often limited to state and organization levels, ignoring the importance of exploring the legitimacy of violence deeply rooted in society and complex interactions and interdependence among the various levels.¹ This chapter proposes a three-tier approach, macro, meso (intermediate), and micro, to understand what prompts violence and offers explanations of the nature and patterns of political violence in Bangladesh in the past decade and a half. The 2000–2017 period is used for analysing political violence in Bangladesh for two reasons. First, this period covers significant variations; the presence of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Awami League (AL), and interim government regimes, both flawed and fair elections, widespread government repressions and the rise, fall, and

resurgence of an Islamist militancy. Second, the trial of war criminals and consequent emergence of two competing social movements, Shahbagh and Hefazat (details of these two movements are discussed later), are the crucial landmarks of this period that may help us understand the increasing political polarization and violence in contemporary Bangladesh and perhaps, in the future as well.

The data used in this chapter have been collected from various sources, including reports and studies of two Dhaka-based human rights organizations – Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) and Odhikar. The Asia Foundation, Conflict Research Group, Microgovernance Research Initiative, and South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) were immensely helpful to this project for their datasets and analyses. However, as these studies conducted their research based on publicly available sources, mainly newspaper reports, the numbers of death, injuries, or events vary depending on their source selections. Also, state censorship and self-censorship, under or over reporting by the biased and partisan newspapers or reporters are significant limitations of this type of research. Nevertheless, these data help analyse the state of political violence in Bangladesh by providing a broader picture of it.

Political developments in contemporary Bangladesh

Due to the bitter rivalry among Bangladeshi political parties, opposition parties take unresolved issues to the streets, rather than discussing them in parliament. It leads to violent clashes with supporters of the ruling party. State responses, often quite heavy-handed and disproportionate, further exacerbate the situation. The anti-government protest led by the AL during the BNP-led coalition regime from 2001 to 2006 took 2,722 lives.² Prior to the ninth national parliamentary election, violence broke out over the disagreement regarding the mechanisms for conducting the election. A military-backed interim government took over and declared a state of emergency in 2007. The first month of the state of emergency witnessed the killing of 29 people, allegedly by law enforcement agencies, and arrests of 52,000, including major political party leaders.³ After the two constitutionally stipulated years, the national election was held in 2008, and AL formed the government.

Political violence in Bangladesh, both violent clashes between major political alliances and incidents of violent extremism, has been on the rise since 2013. Three recent developments had a crucial impact on the propensity of increasing violence. First, the International War Crimes Tribunal (ICT) began its trial in 2010 against those who committed war crimes during the liberation war in 1971. Almost all the main leaders of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) have been arrested for their involvement in war crimes. JeI activists responded with deadly and indiscriminate violence. The government crackdown on JeI activists claimed that JeI, and also the main opposition BNP, have connections with violent extremist groups. Second, Bangladesh witnessed the rise of two competing forces; the Shahbagh movement, and the Hefazat-i-Islam (HI, Protector of Islam) in 2013. The Shahbagh Movement was an urban-youth-led movement that emerged after the ICT sentenced one of the key JeI leaders, Abdul Quader Mollah, to life in prison. The activists of the movement alleged that the

verdict was lenient to the accused as part of a secret deal between the JeI and the government. The Shahbagh movement demanded that the only verdict war criminals deserve is the death penalty. In response, the Islamists labelled Shahbagh activists as the ‘nastiks’ (atheists and anti-Islam). The Islamists, led by HI – an organization of the privately operated, traditional Islamic seminaries (commonly known as qawmi madrassahs) – organized to ‘defend’ Islamic values. HI announced a 13-point agenda, which includes a demand for an anti-blasphemy law carrying the death penalty. HI-led Islamists claimed that activists of the Shahbagh movement (some of them prominent bloggers) had disgraced Islam and demeaned the Prophet Muhammad in their writings and blogs. Both Shahbagh and HI activists demanded each other’s capital punishment. The radical and extreme positions of both of these two groups made the already polarized country even more divided. Finally, the 2014 national election was boycotted by 28 of the 40 political parties in Bangladesh who objected to the removal of caretaker government provisions from the constitution in 2011. The boycotted election resulted in a parliament without any opposition party. The demand for a new election under a non-partisan government by a BNP-led coalition and their call for a general strike and blockade sparked violence all across the country. The response from the government and the ‘crackdown’ on the opposition further worsened the situation.

These developments, worsened by the typical violent rivalry between AL and BNP, and an intolerant and bitter division between Islamists and ultra-seculars, have made Bangladesh a more violence-prone country in recent years.

Key actors of political violence in Bangladesh

A wide array of political actors is responsible for instigating and nourishing the enabling conditions for political violence in Bangladesh. Although the political parties of Bangladesh, almost in every instance, express their different stances and opinions, they have one commonality – using widespread violence for acquiring and sustaining power. Whether it is interparty conflict or intraparty factionalism, both AL and BNP and their alliances, resort to violence for securing their political interests. Besides political parties, members of law enforcement agencies are also actively involved in violent events. Sykens and Islam, in their study, collect data from 14,187 single events of political violence and find a total of 2,400 deaths and 126,300 injuries between 2002 and 2013.⁴ According to their study, law enforcement agencies are the single most active actors in terms of involvement in violent events in Bangladesh with a staggering number of 3519, which accounts for nearly 25% of the total events. AL secures the second position with 3,238 events closely followed by its arch rival BNP’s involvement in 3,112 events.

As existing studies demonstrate, almost all the major political parties, their student wings, Islamists, and leftist groups are regularly involved in political violence, and law enforcement agencies often use violent and oppressive measures. In terms of the degree of involvement in violent events, the sequence of the actors are: Law enforcement agency, Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Bangladesh Chhatro League, BNP centred alliance, Jatiyatabadi Chhatro

Dal, Jamaat-e-Islami centred alliance, Islami Chhatro Shibir, Awami League centred alliance, Jubo League, (Former) Rebel Group, Jubo Dal, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islamist Group (non-JeI), Left Wing Party organisations, and Jatiya Party.⁵ The division and instability in mainstream politics has also created a fertile ground for the violent extremist groups to thrive, re-organize and gain organizational strength. Domestic political turmoil, coupled with rising international and regional threats, notably the rise of the Islamic State and initiation of Al-Qaeda's branch in the Subcontinent (AQIS), made Bangladesh an easy target for extremist groups. Thus, along with these political organizations and groups, Islamist militant organizations are also active participants in political violence and violent extremism in Bangladesh.⁶ In recent years (2013–2017), there have been 50 violent extremism incidents, resulting in 255 deaths and 942 wounded.⁷ After signing the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord in 1997, insurgency in CHT ended, although incidents of factional violence are not uncommon. Several incidents of violence against indigenous communities were also observed.⁸

Political violence: trends and patterns

The trends and patterns of political violence in contemporary Bangladesh have three basic features. First, political violence in contemporary Bangladesh is marked with an upward trend of violent incidents. Second, it is observed that both national and local elections are prone to widespread violence. Also, there is a significant geographical variation in terms of the occurrence of the violent events. Between 2001 and 2017, a steady increase in the number of violent incidents has been observed. These events caused 4,809 deaths and 197,018 injuries (Table 4.1). In total, 201,827 individuals either succumbed to death or were injured by the violent incidents. Along with this upward trend in the number of events, the lethality and frequency of political violence have also increased. There were 2,500 events of violence from 1991 to 2001.⁹ In 2013 alone, 3,870 incidents of political violence occurred resulting in 765 deaths and 30,533 injuries¹⁰ (according to Odhikar, the numbers of deaths and injuries in 2013 are less than this estimation, 504 and 24,176 respectively).

Another important pattern of the political violence in Bangladesh is the staggering number of incidents at the time of elections (see Table 4.1 for deaths and injuries in election years, 2001, 2006, and 2013; I provide a more detailed analysis of electoral violence later in this chapter). The Asia Foundation Report 2017 on the state of conflict and violence in Asia has identified national political conflict and local political and electoral conflict as two of the most 'high' risk factors for Bangladesh.¹¹ A significant pattern regarding post-electoral violence is increasing communal attacks. After the 2001 election, violence compelled 200,000 Hindus to flee to India or to migrate internally within Bangladesh.¹² According to Amnesty International, 300 Hindu owned shops and homes were destroyed between February and April 2013.¹³ The members of the minority community suffered in a similar fashion before and after 2014 national election.

TABLE 4.1 Political Violence in Bangladesh: Number of Deaths and Injuries (2001–2017)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Injuries</i>	<i>Total</i>
2017	77	4,635	4,712
2016	215	9,053	9,268
2015	197	8,312	8,509
2014	190	9,429	9,619
2013	504	24,176	24,680
2012	169	17,161	17,330
2011	135	11,532	11,667
2010	220	13,999	14,219
2009	251	15,559	15,810
2008	50	3,185	3,235
2007	79	2,688	2,767
2006	374	21,265	21,639
2005	310	8,997	9,307
2004	526	6,235	6,761
2003	436	6,281	6,717
2002	420	8,741	9,161
2001	656	25,770	26,426
Total	4,809	197,018	201,827

Source: Prepared based on the data collected from Odhikar, “Political Violence, 2001–2018”, http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Political_Statistics_2001-May-2018-.pdf (accessed March 10, 2018).

There are significant regional variations as well. The Dhaka division is the most affected by events of political violence, which is not surprising considering this division contains the capital of the country. The political centrality, huge population, and law enforcement agencies’ more repressive position may also contribute to the increasing political violence in this region. About a third of all violent incidents are recorded in the Dhaka division (4,755 events). The Chittagong division is the second most affected region (2,642 events). Among the rest, Rajshahi (2,073 events) and Khulna (2,010 events) are more affected by violence than Rangpur (891 events), Barishal (881 events), and Sylhet (635 events). The numbers of injuries due to political violence follow a similar pattern with Dhaka as the most affected. However, the number of deaths has a significant regional variation. The Khulna Division endures the most lethal casualties (28.8%), and Dhaka jointly shares second position (18.2%) with Rajshahi. With 16.6%, Chittagong is in fourth position.¹⁴

Political violence: level of analysis

I argue that political violence in contemporary Bangladesh needs to be explained by dividing it into three levels: macro, meso, and micro. This framework is

drawn from Della Porta's analysis on the violent groups from Italy and Germany. Along with her state oppression variable at macro-level, I have added enabling conditions relevant to Bangladesh politics. Although Porta's analysis focuses more on the left-libertarian movements, there are uncanny similarities with Bangladeshi mainstream political parties. Bangladeshi political parties regularly engage in political violence as do other violent groups.¹⁵

Macro-level

In macro-level, I identify four major factors behind intensifying political violence in Bangladesh. First, the nature of Bangladesh politics is conducive to violence with the existence of a dynastic and a winner-takes-all political system, and deeply rooted patron-client relations. Second, disagreement over the core and fundamental principles of the country, such as national identity and the role of religion in society, creates an enabling environment for thriving and intensifying political violence. Third, government's heavy handed approach to the opposition, coercive state response, and closing political opportunities is likely to be an important factor for fuelling political violence. Last, Bangladesh is still struggling to find a fair and acceptable way of conducting elections. In the absence of an independent and strong electoral commission, elections often succumb to muscle, money, and undue influences, and are frequently manipulated by the ruling political parties. This results in widespread electoral violence, both at the national and local levels.

Dynastic and clientelistic politics

Bangladesh politics, in a nutshell, is 'dynastic' in spite of its democratic façade. Two major political parties, AL and BNP, are greatly dominated by the members of two families. The current prime minister, and President of AL, is the daughter of Shiekh Mujibur Rahman, the central leader of the liberation movement of Bangladesh, and the chairperson of BNP is the widow of the founder of BNP and late President Ziaur Rahman. Their sons also play crucial roles in Bangladesh politics; one is BNP's second man and another is an influential advisor to the current prime minister. The dynasty is also prominent in the third largest party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Party (JP). The founder of JP, HM Ershad, and his wife, Rawshan Ershad, mainly run the party. One of Ershad's brothers is also an influential party leader. The dynastic nature of Bangladesh politics not only depends on how the key positions are controlled by the heads of the parties and their family members, but also the degree of power they exercise, and the absolute influence they possess over their respective political parties. In the last national council of AL, held in 2016, Hasina has been made chief of the party for the eighth time since 1981.¹⁶ Similarly, in March 2016, Khaleda was re-elected unopposed as the chairperson of BNP for the fourth time by the BNP National Council.¹⁷ The consecutive uncontested 'selection' in party conventions

indicates the amount of control they hold over their party leaderships. Interestingly, some even believe that this dynastic nature is necessary to ensure the stability and unity of these political parties.¹⁸

Thus, it is not surprising that commentators of Bangladesh politics identify the major political parties of Bangladesh as undemocratic, supported by their own party constitutions.¹⁹ Almost all the activities of the political parties including decision making and electing the leadership are based on the cult of the leader. It seems that the top leaders have achieved a 'patrimonial right'²⁰ to determine fates and control all aspects of their parties. One of the most crucial reasons why the dynastic political system does not confront any challenge whatsoever within or outside political parties is the prevailing patron-client relationship between party leaders and their clients.²¹ The clients are both members of the political parties and individuals who seek benefits from the leaders. If the clients challenge their patrons in any way, they would risk forfeiting their benefits. Hence, rather than challenging the existing dynastic and undemocratic political party system, the clients try their best to further support and reinforce clientelistic politics.

Interestingly, this patron-client relationship works in multiple layers from the national to the sub-district levels. Here, politics evolved around instrumental gains such as securing jobs, development contracts, land and property grabbing, and other monetary benefits. Generally, the local leaders are offered party nominations for the national parliament election or important positions in local bodies of political parties in exchange for the complete allegiance of the top leaders of the party.²² The local patrons use influence or muscle, whichever seems fit, to ensure their desired distribution among the clients. Consequently, the clash of interests among the influential patrons leads to different visible and clandestine factions among the political parties and eventually resentment turns into violence. In Bangladesh politics, the winning political party secures absolute control of power for the electoral term. This winner-takes-all power game strengthens the desire of the party leaders to personalize state power. Owing to this winner-takes-all power struggle, the ruling and opposition parties become so polarised that moderate factions, or neutral peace envoys, fail to negotiate an agreement.²³

Construction of divergence and polarity: national identity and the role of religion

The acrimonious disputes and divisions over core issues, such as national identity and the role of religion, create an enabling environment for thriving political violence in Bangladesh.²⁴ The AL tries to project itself as a secular champion for upholding the 'freedom-fighting' spirit disparaging the rival BNP as 'pro-Pakistan'. In doing so, it wants to attract the segment of the Bangladeshi population that is more concerned about their 'Bengali culture' identity. However, it does not reject the 'Islamic' identity, rather sometimes endorsing it and making coalitions with Islamists when it deems such behaviour necessary to win votes in elections. Similarly, the BNP describes the Awami League as 'pro-India' and projects itself as a defender of the

sovereignty of the nation, distinct Bangladeshi culture, and progressive Islamic values. The bitter relationship between the two main parties does not help resolve the clash between competing 'Bengali culture' and 'Islam' identities. Rather, each group has exploited these identities time and time again to gain popular support. The prevalence of political rivalry has prevented these two identities from being successfully melded together.

Although secularism was one of the four pillars of the Bengali national movement, Rahman suggests, 'Bangladeshis have yet to understand its contextualized meaning...Bangladesh's "political secularism" is at best a façade....[the] task of secularizing Bangladesh or promoting values of "secularity" within society has never been seriously initiated'.²⁵ He further argues, 'in spite of the fifteenth amendment of the constitution, which "apparently" reinstated secularism as the state policy, secularism does not really exist in Bangladesh'.²⁶ The tendency for drawing a line between the two major political parties and their alliances over the divisions, such as 'Bengali versus Bangladeshi', 'pro vs anti-liberation war', and 'Islam vs secularism' are overly simplistic. These binary divisions often overlook the complex power game associated with Bangladesh politics. I argue that these binary polarizations are more rhetorical than actual. These artificially constructed divisions secure political gains, sustain power, and help them to win elections. The process of creating and nourishing these divisions is also instrumental in increasing the support base of the political parties.

William B. Milam points in the right direction when he identifies motives of the political parties instead of emphasizing what political parties want to project themselves:

winning is not just everything, it is the only thing... Political leaders and their parties have had no inhibitions about creating crises of almost any nature and dimension to gain or regain office...For many years, Bangladeshi politics has resembled a bare-knuckle fight – bloody, vicious, without rules, and sometimes fatal.²⁷

Similarly, Mohsin and Guhathakurta suggest:

Conflicts between the Awami League and BNP were more about power sharing than anything else – namely, they were concerned with job sharing, the acquisition of property and business licenses and tenders, as has been clearly demonstrated in open disputes between the two student branches of mainstream parties in various university campuses.²⁸

Thus, both of the two major political parties, the AL and the BNP, create 'us' and 'them' divisions to gain political interest. Whether at the expense of religion, secularism, religious minority, or 'chetona' (conscience of liberation war), the main game is 'securing' and 'sustaining' absolute power and leverage over the opponents.

Closing political opportunities and coercive state response

Existing studies show that closing political opportunities and coercive state response to the protests trigger political violence.²⁹ In Bangladesh, there are many instances of extra-judicial killings, death, and torture in custody, and enforced disappearances observed between 2000 and 2017. Human rights organizations blame the state for being responsible for carrying out extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances for eliminating and intimidating political opponents and rivals.³⁰ These coercive measures are also used as the tools for limiting social and political dissent. There are several types of extra-judicial killings, such as cross-fire/gunfight, shoot to death, torture to death, suffocate to death, and beat to death. Also, death in jail custody is not uncommon.

Although there were some instances before, extrajudicial killings reached a peak in 2004 when ‘Operation Clean Heart’ was initiated by then BNP government. From 2004 to 2006, the total number of extra-judicial killings was a staggering 991 (Table 4.2). Initially it gained popular support as the targets were infamous criminals and both Islamist and leftist extremists. However, later political opposition leaders and opponents gradually became targets. In some instances, members of law enforcement agencies even allegedly worked as ‘contract killers’ for the influential political leaders.³¹ The fatalities reduced after 2006 and reached their lowest, 70, in 2012. The casualties increased again in 2013 and extra-judicial killings claimed 329 lives. This increase is not surprising because of the intensity of the political conflicts and coercive state responses taken at that time. To counter violent protests, road blockades, and demonstrations, law enforcement agencies used excessive force. In 2013 alone, 245 individuals were shot to death by security officials (see Table 4.2). Law enforcement agencies launched brutal crackdowns on opposition political parties before, during, and after the 2014 elections. Human Rights Watch recorded the killing of 11 opposition leaders and activists during this period.³² There are several incidents of indiscriminate arrests, for example, law enforcers arrested 2,100 leaders and activists from the opposition parties in June 2016.³³

Bangladesh has faced rising enforced disappearances in recent years. According to Odhikar, a total of 414 individuals went missing between 2009 and 2017 (Table 4.2). Among them, 243 disappeared in just the last three years. These missing persons include teachers, political activists and leaders, a former ambassador, journalists, students, and businessmen. Some of these have returned for a short period of time, some of them were shown as arrested, and some are still missing. The accounts of the returned victims and their detention experience are dubiously similar (Odhikar 2017).³⁴ Their statements demonstrate that their ‘abductors were well-organised and they have the infrastructural facility to disappear people’.³⁵

Freedom of the media has also worsened in recent years. Between 2001 and 2017, journalists and media personnel were attacked in least in 4,831 events³⁶. In 2017 alone, 32 persons were detained under the Information and Communication

TABLE 4.2 Coercive State Responses in Bangladesh: 2001–2017

<i>Year</i>	<i>Extra-Judicial Killing</i>	<i>Crossfire/Gunfight</i>	<i>Death in Jail Custody</i>	<i>Shot to Death</i>	<i>Tortured to Death</i>	<i>Enforced Disappearance*</i>
2017	154	139	59	1	12	86
2016	178	151	63	13	11	91
2015	186	148	51	22	8	66
2014	172	119	54	38	11	39
2013	329	65	59	245	11	54
2012	70	53	63	8	7	26
2011	84	65	105	1	17	31
2010	127	101	60	2	22	18
2009	154	129	50	4	21	3
2008	149	136	66	1	12	–
2007	184	130	87	13	30	–
2006	355	290	62	35	27	–
2005	396	340	76	27	26	–
2004	240	166	80	27	46	–
2003	81	33	90	11	25	–
2002	83	5	107	17	50	–
2001	44	0	72	31	8	–
Total	2,986	2,070	1204	496	344	414

Source: Compiled based on the data collected from Odhikar, <http://odhikar.org/#> (accessed March 10, 2018).

*This dataset only contains the number of enforced disappearance from 2009 to 2017.

Technology Act 2006 (Amended 2009 & 2013).³⁷ These individuals were often detained for criticising high officials of the government and their families on social media. Most recently, the government has approved the draft of the Digital Security Act 2018. Journalists and rights defenders have expressed their concern that some of the provisions of this act are ‘draconian’³⁸ and will ‘gag...freedom of expression’.³⁹

Elections and dispute over electoral system

Ensuring electoral accountability and arranging a fair and credible election are major challenges for democracy in Bangladesh. The weak electoral organizations and disputes over the systems of conducting elections worsened the situation. The achievements of conducting fair elections in the near past have been marred by recent events. Between 2000 and 2017, Bangladesh witnessed three elections in 2001, 2008, and 2014. In 2001, the total number of lethal and non-lethal casualties in violent events was 26,426, which gradually declined

after the election (in 2002 it was 9,161 and in 2003, 6,717⁴⁰). The number of deaths and injuries due to political violence again rose, from 9,307 in 2005 to 21,639 in 2006 (Table 4.1) over the dispute of how the caretaker government should be formed. This dispute again came to the forefront in 2013 when the ruling party AL wanted to conduct the election under the control of the incumbent government whereas the main opposition BNP and its allies objected and advocated for a neutral caretaker government. Following a similar pattern of increasing violence during elections, 2013 witnessed a sharp rise in violence. The number of lethal and non-lethal casualties increased from 17,330 in 2012 to 24,680 in 2013 (Table 4.1). The date of the election, January 5, 2014, is considered as the bloodiest election day in the history of Bangladesh marked by fatalities (19 deaths), low voter turnout, and vote-rigging.⁴¹ Three election officials were killed and 330 were injured.⁴² Voting was suspended in 597 polling booths,⁴³ and 553 schools and other educational institutions were damaged.⁴⁴

The post-election violence often starts with the losing party's protest against the election outcome, and sometimes can linger for years. After the 2014 election, AL refused the demands for a fresh election. The violent protest on the anniversary of the tenth national election in January 2015 escalated into a violent standoff between these two groups, resulting in 36 deaths.⁴⁵ Nearly 1,200 vehicles were burnt, and 112 people died in the first two months of 2015.⁴⁶ According to an estimation of the World Bank, the political mayhem in the first three months of 2015 costs USD 2.2 billion.⁴⁷

Not only in national level parliament elections, violence is also a common feature in local government elections, including City Corporation, union parishad and upazilla (sub-district) elections. The amendment of the Local Government Act in December 2015 allowed political parties to contest local elections for the first time, which escalated incidents of violence. Before and after municipal elections in 2015, Odhikar recorded six deaths and nearly 1,300 injuries.⁴⁸ Conflicts in local government elections caused the deaths of more than 140 people between March and June 2016.⁴⁹ To protest against government policy on disputed election issues, opposition parties and coalitions often use general strikes as a weapon. General strikes, locally known as *hartal*, have achieved a different meaning and connotation in Bangladesh. From a rightful way of protesting against government's policies, it transforms into a means for terrorizing people. Both the government and opposition parties demonstrate their muscle and use excessive power during hartal days. Deliberate attacks against both party members and civilians with improvised explosive devices, arson, and vandalizing are common features. The government also uses law enforcers, local party members and goons to counter the protesters. This turns major cities into battlefields. In the 2002–2013 period, Bangladesh experienced 369 hartal days and about one-fourth of the total violent events in this period occurred during these strike days.⁵⁰

Meso-level

An analysis of how different actors generate violence at the organizational level in contemporary Bangladesh reveals interesting findings. Alongside the usual and expected rivalry among the political organizations, intra-party clashes are frequent. Also, it has been observed that when organizations boycott parliament or do not participate in mainstream politics, go underground, or encounter repression from the state, they tend to become more violent. Finally, this level examines how political organizations construct narratives that justify using violence.

Intra-party clashes

The power struggle between the AL and the BNP makes interparty clashes almost inevitable. Over the period of 2002–2013, AL and BNP clashed with each other on 1,988 occasions, and AL and JcI in 404 events.⁵¹ Besides inter-party clashes, Bangladesh political parties experience widespread factional violence. Most of the time, the ruling party accounted for the larger share of the total number of intra-party clashes. As it happens irrespective of the regimes, it may suggest that intra-party clashes are related to struggles over getting benefits and controlling resources.

Between 2009 and 2017, 385 AL leaders/activists were killed and 37,830 injured due to intra-party violence (Table 4.3). The data also show an interesting variation that number of fatalities and injuries due to factional violence in AL was very low in 2013. This is especially interesting considering the widespread presence of violence in 2013 in all other aspects. This variation indicates a possible correlation between the increasing number of protests against the ruling party and decreasing intra-party

TABLE 4.3 Intra-party Clashes: Deaths, Injuries, and Incidents

Year	Deaths			Injuries			Total Incidents		
	AL	BNP	Others	AL	BNP	Others	AL	BNP	Others
2017	66	0	0	3,327	225	10	314	22	1
2016	73	3	0	3,586	232	5	335	15	1
2015	40	2	0	3,884	157	12	364	11	1
2014	43	2	0	4,247	397	119	374	39	6
2013	28	6	0	2,980	1,592	68	263	140	3
2012	37	6	0	4,330	1,619	47	382	146	5
2011	22	3	1	3,770	1,234	20	340	104	4
2010	38	7	9	5,614	1,146	60	576	92	9
2009	38	2	0	6,092	865	0	663	75	0
Total	385	31	10	37,830	7,467	341	3,611	644	30

Source: Odhikar, “Political Violence, 2001–2018”, http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Political_Statistics_2001-May-2018-.pdf (accessed March 10, 2018).

violence. In comparison to AL, the number of deaths and injuries due to intra-party violence is astoundingly low in the BNP. Between 2009 and 2017, 31 deaths and 7,467 injuries are recorded (Table 4.3). Between the alliance members factionalism is not negligible, though it is much less than in intra-party violence. Members of the BNP and JeI clashed in 182 incidents. Compared to the high number of factional violence in AL and BNP, incidents of violence are significantly lower among JeI associated organizations, at only 13.⁵²

Changing strategies of the organizations: using violence and encapsulation

Situations that compel political groups to go underground, such as banning by states, or shrinking the political space to a degree that makes it difficult for the groups to operate, are likely to trigger political violence. These adverse situations affect the organizational structure and political activities. In contemporary Bangladesh, when the JeI was disqualified from participating in the 2014 election with the electoral commission cancelling its registration, the party responded violently with arson, road blockades, and attacking members of law enforcement agencies. Both AL and BNP became more violent when they boycotted parliament and took matters to the streets to oppose government policies and decisions. For coercive state response and shrinking political space, political organizations often think that using violence is the only viable option for them.

Not only because of restrictive political opportunity and state suppression, sometimes organizations themselves willingly choose to go underground and operate clandestinely to achieve their goals and fulfill their agendas. The most glaring examples of this encapsulation of the organizations are the militant groups of Bangladesh. Although some of these groups exploited situations and operated in the public arena from time to time, their radical organizational structure and agenda compel them to go underground. Riaz⁵³ classifies the Islamist militants into five generations.⁵⁴ The first generation of militants were the products of the Afghan war (1979–1992) and their organization is the fountainhead of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh. Their organization is known as *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* Bangladesh (Movement of Islamic Holy War, or HuJI-B). The second generation consists of *Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh* (Party of the Mujahedeen, or JMB) and *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh* (Awake the Muslim People of Bangladesh, or JMJB). This generation of militants established a reign of terror, and are infamous for their killings in the northwestern part of Bangladesh, simultaneous attacks with 450 homemade bombs, and a number of suicide attacks. The third generation, known as *Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh* (HT), attracted many middle-class and urban-based youths. The fourth generation, *Ansarullah Bangla Team*, surfaced in 2007. The group was led by a local cleric Jasimuddin Rahmani, and inspired by Anwar al-Awlaki. In September 2014, Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri announced the beginning of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Also, since early 2015, many individuals reportedly involved with Islamic State (IS) have been captured by law-enforcement agencies. This fifth generation of the Bangladeshi Islamist militants are either inspired by, and/or connected to, the transnational VE groups.

Between 2000 and 2017, Bangladesh witnessed 80 incidents of violent extremism, which caused 457 deaths and 2,041 injuries.⁵⁵ Exploiting the political turmoil and instability in 2013, militant groups re-emerged as a vicious threat to Bangladesh. In 2013, 139 were killed and 664 were injured by 29 events of violent extremism attacks.⁵⁶ According to another estimate, at least 40 pro-secular writers and activists, foreigners, and members of religious minorities have been murdered by the violent extremists since then.⁵⁷ Among these attacks, perhaps the most gruesome and well known was the July 1, 2016 incident, when extremists stormed into Holey Artisan Bakery, a restaurant popular among foreigners in an upscale neighbourhood in Dhaka. They hacked and stabbed to death 20 hostages, including Indian, Italian, Japanese, and U.S. citizens. A twelve-hour siege which was widely broadcast around the world, ended with the security forces' operation. Two law enforcers and four militants were killed in the gunfight.

Narrative construction of violence

Political groups often try to legitimize violence by constructing a violence justification narrative. The major political parties, especially the BNP and AL, construct their narratives by their references to a certain past. AL's construction of narratives mainly circles around its role in the liberation movement. Besides the role of the party, they adulate their leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, 'Father of the Nation', for his leadership, personality, oratory, and dreams. The narrative constructed by AL also projects the party as the saviour of 'muktijuddher chetona' (conscience of liberation war), secularism, and Bengali culture and tradition. In contrast, BNP's construction of narrative evolves around the 'Muktijuddher Ghosok' (the first to call for independence), and 'charismatic' leadership of its founder Ziaur Rahman. BNP leaders also demand that they are the true saviours of 'Bangladeshi' nationalism and Islamic 'mullobodh' (values). No speech of any political leaders of AL and BNP, irrespective of occasion, location, and necessity, ends without a reference to the 'greatness' of their top leaders and their 'unforgettable' feats.

This reference to the past and competition of the greatness of their heroes has divided the political parties, their leaders, party members, and supporters. Unfortunately, this division has permeated all levels of the nation, including professionals, members of civil society, teachers, students, and journalists. The divisions and polarizations have different names, such as 'pro-Indian vs anti-Indian', 'pro-Pakistan vs anti-Pakistan', 'Bengali vs Bangladeshi' nationalism, 'secularism vs Islamist', 'Mujib vs Zia', and 'Hasina vs Khaleda' and so on. The divisions described here transcend the boundary of verbal dispute and break into violent conflicts.

Besides centrist parties like the BNP and AL, Islamist parties and radical organizations also construct their violence justification narratives with reference to certain elements of ideology. All the Islamist political parties and groups, such as JeI, HI, and Islami Oikko Jot, despite their differences in ideologies, try to project themselves as the saviour and safeguard of Islam. They justify their actions, no matter how controversial and violent they are, as a necessity to protect the

'authenticity' of Islamic values. In a similar but more radical fashion, Bangladeshi extremists also ignore the diversities and different interpretations of Islam and construct a monolithic violence justification narrative to radicalize individuals. Their narrative also obfuscates the variations within Muslim communities around the world and constructs a global Muslim identity. Their violence justifying narrative contains a crisis, an ultimate solution, and a way out to reach that solution. In this frame of reference, perception of political or social humiliation and grievances of 'Muslims' serves as the crisis, consequently the establishment of a 'sharia-based just and good society' as the solution and violence as the means to achieve the goal.

The war crime trial and consequent resurgence of two competing forces, the Shahbagh and Hefajat movements, also demonstrates the construction of two violent narratives.⁵⁸ On one hand, activists of the Hefajat movement project themselves as 'peace-loving, unarmed and religious Muslims' who are only trying to safeguard Islam from the 'enemies of Islam and its prophet' or Shahbaghis. In contrast, proponents of the Shahbagh movement describe protesters and organizers as 'hero', 'saviour of the nation', 'new freedom-fighters', and portray Hefajats as 'Taliban', 'vandals', and 'backward fundamentalists'. Thus, these two groups create a divided ideological world between 'us' and 'them' and strongly oppose each other with violent hatred and animosity.

Micro-level

The micro-level refers to individuals' motivations to participate in political violence. Along with macro (societal), and meso (organizational) factors, individuals' strategic choices to involve in political violence deserves more analysis. Martha Crenshaw⁵⁹ considers radicals and terrorists as rational actors and argues that joining violent organizations is an intentional action. Della Porta suggests that the reason someone would choose to participate in political violence could be explained by social networks, collective identity, collective action frames, and incentives.⁶⁰ In the case of political violence of Bangladesh, social network plays a crucial role. The membership of social networks; especially friends, or local acquaintances, provides an emotional fulfilment to the individuals. Gradually, with increasing involvement in political activities, individuals get psychological fulfilment and develop a strong collective identity to the political groups. According to one study⁶¹ on the involvement of the street children in political violence in Bangladesh, performing picketing and other violent acts in blockades and strikes was outsourced to the street children before the tenth national election, as a large number of the opposition leaders and activists were imprisoned. Although these children received a very small amount of money, the main reason behind their involvement was the connection with *boro-bhais*, or local goons. Similarly, the ruling party also used them along with law enforcers to counter the protests. Through this type of continuous interaction and participation in political activities, including acts of violence, 'meaning is constructed and identities are created'.⁶²

The construction of meaning and identities make individuals think that only their versions of history, ideology, or religion is correct and authentic, and all others are wrong. Berger and Luckman⁶³ call it visions of external reality. The prevailing binary divisions in Bangladesh help individuals to construct their external reality that supports a certain political party, and completely reject the other. The recent social movements, Shahbagh and Hefajat, clearly show how the creation of external reality could lead to divisions and bring violent outcomes. Thus, activists who participate in political violence not only do it for monetary benefits, but the reasons behind participation could be a combination of different factors, such as the influence of social networks, allegiance to groups, or the pursuit of significance.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered explanations of the nature and patterns of political violence in Bangladesh in the past decade and a half. It finds that the incidents of political violence in contemporary Bangladesh have been increasing in recent years, violent incidents are more frequent in election years, and violence occurs more in major cities, especially Dhaka and Chittagong. Drawing on the available data between 2000 and 2017 and the extant explanations, the chapter argues that political violence cannot be understood without looking at its multilayered features. It proposes three levels to understand what prompts violence. At the macro-level, the chapter examines how closing political opportunities and coercive state responses heightened political violence in Bangladesh. The influence of dynastic, clientelistic, and a winner-takes-all political system in Bangladesh and widespread violence in national and local elections have further exacerbated the situation. The analysis of the meso or intermediate level shows different actors generating violence in contemporary Bangladesh. Besides the conflicts between political parties, frequent intra-party clashes took a huge toll on lives and also destroyed properties. Also, due to shrinking political space and the state's coercive responses, political groups change their organizational structure and agenda. Absence or lack of participation in a democratic system also leads to violence. The political organizations construct narratives that justify using violence by referring to the past. At the micro-level, the chapter describes the creation of identity of an individual with a particular political group and motivation of involvement in violence. Although described separately, these three levels are inter-related, interdependent, and often reinforce each other.

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5

STATE VIOLENCE AND THE EVERYDAY

The ecology of suspicion and distrust

Zobaida Nasreen

Introduction

One foggy morning in December 2012, I was on the way to my field area in Khagrachari district in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) on a bus. Suddenly the bus stopped. I did not have any idea where exactly it was, but I had known that buses were regularly checked three or four times a day in different parts of the CHT. Though military check posts, as provided for the CHT Accord,¹ were supposed to be gradually withdrawn, there was a heavy presence of the military. After two or three minutes, four military personnel entered the bus and started checking all the seats and the people inside. They questioned some of the passengers who lowered their eyes and replied in a low voice addressing them as 'sir'. The military were carrying rifles and had torches in their hands. The entire situation was tense. The passengers had their mouths closed. The military personnel continued their search for about five minutes and then the bus was allowed to go only when they were satisfied with everything.

I asked the person seated next to me whether the CHT 'Peace' Accord could do anything about such military checks. He replied that it had become less frequent, but that was all. Through our conversation, I learned that his name was Nobarun Khisa, and that he was from Panchari upazila in Khagrachari. He told me that previously these checks had been run four or five times on the way to Dhaka and back. Whenever the bus was stopped, mostly the Chakma² people were asked to step out from the bus and were often ordered to sign their names going into the cantonment or other check posts.

Nobarun then narrated an incident he had encountered two years earlier. It was early in the morning, and he was on a bus heading to Dhaka. At the first check post on the journey, military personnel entered the bus and forced the Chakma people to get off—a usual exercise in line with 'unspoken' rules imposed by the military in the CHT. Nobarun did not get off as he felt irritated about the checking. When a military man ordered him to do so, he replied, 'I'm not a Chakma, I'm a Khisa'.³ He told me

laughingly that the military personnel thought Khisa was a different ethnic group.⁴ So, they did not extend the conversation with him any further. He commented: 'The military personnel think that they are very clever and we are stupid and simple. But they do not know that we are actually cleverer to some extent. The reality is, we do not have power. So, we have to adjust ourselves more or less with the rules and regulations imposed by the military'.

This instance helps to explain the atmosphere of the CHT where fear in everyday life is the reality. Self-surveillance here acts in association with other exercises of the care of the self. So the ecology of fear becomes the meta-narrative of my research. Green⁵ had similar experiences among the people of Xe'caj in Guatemala. She stated that fear is the reality in which people live, fear is the authority of power that was unseen and silent. She speaks of the invisible violence of fear as a result of the ongoing militarization in Guatemala, which is very similar to the experiences of the indigenous people of the CHT. She shows how people are socialized into a life of terror, conflict and militarization. She discusses the ways such societies internalize fear. Lawrence⁶ talks about people living in the throes of war having to unlearn and choke natural human reaction in the face of fear and surveillance, e.g. going to aid a neighbor in distress (in case their action is interpreted as support for one or other of the various militant groups or the military). She adopts Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon model in which self-censorship happens to be second nature, and she emphasizes that most social scientists miss this context in which people live.

This chapter, therefore, deals with the nature of state violence in the CHT through the lens of everyday forms of suspicion and distrust. To understand the ecology of fear in the CHT, this paper uses Bentham's idea of Panopticon to demonstrate the impact of constant surveillance not only on an individual or an institution like prison, but also on the society as a whole. The core issues of this chapter are three-fold: it discusses military intervention in everyday life of the indigenous people, which creates an ecology of fear and suspicion in the CHT; it includes the semantic resistance of the indigenous people towards fear; it also argues that the culture of distrust and suspicion has become the reality of regional indigenous politics in the CHT.

Situated within the contexts of the anthropology of violence, state, displacement, indigeneity and South Asia, this study is rooted in the paradigm of historical and social anthropology. The approach of the study is multi-sited, discursive, grounded on a qualitative methodology—using walking interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, narrative analysis and participant observation—and is based on a nine-month ethnographic research between 2012 and 2013 in two districts of the CHT among four indigenous groups—Chakma, Marma, Tripura and Santal.

The geography of the CHT

The CHT lies in the southeastern part of Bangladesh, bordering the Rakhine and Chin States of Myanmar, and the Tripura and Mizoram States of India. The area of the region is 13,295 square kilometers, which is approximately one-tenth of the total area of Bangladesh. In 2004, the ratio of indigenous population and Bengali people were

44% and 56% respectively.⁷ The indigenous people in the CHT categorize Bengali people there into three types.⁸ The Task Force on the CHT, formed after signing the CHT Accord, admitted that by the end of 1999 about 128,000 families (approximately 500,000 people) had been internally displaced. The ratio of internally displaced persons is very high when one considers that the total population of the CHT is about 1,100,000. So, about a half of the population was displaced during the 25-year conflict. In 1997, the Accord signed between the government and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) brought a formal end to the conflict by giving the region limited autonomy. However, the precarious nature of the Accord still remains a matter of contention and, since then there has been a clear division among the indigenous people of the CHT into pro- and anti-peace factions. The critics of the Accord developed the United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF), a new organization that vows to carry on the struggle to attain full autonomy.

Everyday violence

During the early 1980s when the armed conflict between Shanti Bahini (SB) and the Bangladesh Army intensified, the government exercised its power by military means, leading to massacres of local people. But after the CHT Accord, the state power was often indirectly exercised through arson attacks carried out by Bangali settlers backed by the military. In the CHT, there are four types of reality: political, military, intellectual and psychological. The political reality includes the doctrines, deeds and behind-the-scene machinations of power brokers. There is the military reality: the strategies, tactics and loyalties of commanders, the camaraderie, actions and briefs of soldiers. There is the intellectual reality and the psychological reality: the fear, anxiety and repression among people in the CHT.

In a meeting with a group of activists, at which I was present, on December 4, 2013, government officials claimed that peace prevailed in the CHT, and that communal attacks were ‘isolated incidents’ rather than evidence of ‘routine violence’. The administrative voices—of the Deputy Commissioner and other government officials—claimed that ‘peace’ was everywhere in the CHT and the law and order situation in Khagrachari was under control, especially after the communal attack on the Buddhist community in Cox’s Bazar. They said that as the CHT Accord had ended the armed conflict between the military and SB, there should not be any violence. The authorities maintained that in the post-Accord situation, conflicts only existed between PCJSS and UPDF where the blame ultimately is put on the indigenous leaders.

Not only are they scared by the military presence, they are also fearful of the newcomer Bangalis in the locality (since in the locality everyone seems to know each other) and members of PCJSS and UPDF. As a result, they cannot trust anyone in that area. To theorize this everyday threat of violence, I draw from ethnographies of Das, Kleinman and Ramphel⁹ that show how violence examines the process through which it is actualized. Their comparative ethnographies provide accounts of the manner in which everyday life is transformed by

engagement with violence through direct and indirect methods, but in doing so they cross-examine the notion of everyday life from the site of the ordinary. In the CHT, ordinary life is replete with the threat of violence and fear. Hence, the people are cautious of opening their doors. They were scared of my olive-colored bag since the military uses that color. They do not want to make a permanent home as they fear that they could be displaced at any time. They are even frightened to use their mobile phones. They also try to take safe routes to avoid further violence while negotiating with everyday forms of violence.

While focusing on state violence I will explore through the works of Michel Foucault and James Scott how state violence is normalized through every day practices and surveillance, how it might be internalized by victims and how they might resist the imposition of violence through their everyday acts of resistance. This chapter explores the possibilities of everyday forms of agency and overt resistance among the indigenous communities in CHT in response to the violence. However, this chapter is also cautious not to indulge in the romanticization of resistance as discussed by Ortner.¹⁰ She speaks about subaltern groups being internally divided by factors like age and gender at the same time. These factors allow one to have a 'different, even opposed but still legitimate perspective on the situation'. Ortner writes about the importance of acknowledging internal politics, among the subordinate people. I avoid this romanticization and essentialization by not only highlighting various intra-community dynamics but also by examining the prevalence of suspicion, complicity, self-surveillance and distrust. I draw on Das' analysis¹¹ where she shows how the terrifying brutalities of the Partition of 1947 left a bequest of relationships marked by suspicion, sullenness and treachery not only between Hindus and Muslims but also between men and women of the same community and even the same kinship groups.

In trying to understand the threat of violence, my chapter also focuses on the narration of multiple experiences of indigenous women belonging to different groups and with various levels of socio-economic status.

Violence is also an intricately layered phenomenon where each participant, each witness to violence, brings their own perspectives and techniques to it. Mehta¹² explains how local structures of feeling are generated to sustain the potential for violence, while Das similarly shows the heterogeneity of these local structures of feeling and the potential for a different stance toward violence contained in everyday life. The state treats the CHT as a 'terrorist zone' or 'punishment zone', and introduces new forms of discipline that then become the norm. As a result, the people of the CHT were not allowed to use mobile phones for a long time. Successive governments have also been transferring corrupt civil servants to the CHT as a form of punishment. The state has always tried to legalize its decision to deploy the military in the CHT and it has been aided in this process by the competition for power between numerous government bodies in the CHT (regional council, hill district council, CHTDB, military and so on), which encourages further threats of violence.

Everyday fear

The chapter explores the everyday forms of fear among indigenous women by examining their language, forms of activism and self-surveillance processes used to keep them safe or to avoid further violence. I have found that disowning their own memories of violence and displacement have become part of their self-surveillance. They feel that they are being monitored constantly. As Koskela¹³ notes:

a surveillance camera is an enigmatic object. Even though people under surveillance are aware of the fact that the camera itself cannot see, they are at the same time aware that someone sees, or might see through it. Although at a particular moment people are aware that someone may or may not be looking at them, they are aware of the 'gaze', and this gaze is (partly) unrelated to the act of looking.

Indigenous communities sometimes consider negotiating an attitude toward the state and settler Bengalis as a part of their self-surveillance. Margolds¹⁴ critically examines the widespread usage of such constructs as 'culture of terror' and 'culture of fear' to characterize settings in which state power affects civilians. Taussig's concept¹⁵ of 'culture of terror/fear' suggests that terror and fear are totalizing circumstances that arrange all the fear experienced in daily life. The notion of a universal 'culture of fear', however, tells us little about the sources of courage that enabled mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared in Argentina to appear in public with photographs of their lost children, marking themselves as radicals during the country's 'dirty war'. Even as some of their own were being killed¹⁶ the women publicly personified a culturally stranded claim to justice that ultimately became more widely retrievable in their terrorized society.

Green's work gives an ethnographic account of self-surveillance, visible and non-visible violence in Guatemala and shows on the one hand how everyone lives in fear of further violence and on the other hand, she discusses secrecy and silence as well as the survival strategies of those people. Zur's work¹⁷ helps to make sense of the violence in field areas where most people were either resisting or coping with violence via multiple forms (socio-political, sexual, age-based, ethnic and so on). Zur identifies the violence that occurred in Guatemala as socio-political. Violence did not target every member of the population but was linked to socio-economic status, which, in Guatemala, was in turn linked to ethnicity.

The discussion of history engaged through collective memory is presented in Green's study of fear's diffusion of social memory in Guatemala. Many Guatemalans live in fear due to steady surveillance, kidnapping, torture and murder. As a result, their subjection to violence has become the custom. These communities use their collective memory of past Spanish subjugation to symbolize their present experiences. Green captures the sense of insecurity that suffuses the individual woman's life, wracked by dreadful memories of physical and emotional survival, ongoing militarization and never-ending fear. She explores the effects that fear has had on Guatemalan society in the wake of genocide. She was struck by the persistent sense of fear and unease that saturated and structured their lives.

Similarly, in the CHT women have lived under constant threat and surveillance by a nearby military settlement, civil patrols and unknown neighbors who worked as the 'ears' of the government. Again, their fear was generated by more indirect factors such as disappearing bodies, rumors, uncertainty, puzzling forms of speech and constant mistrust. In the CHT, the state engaged in violence in the form of military operations and the military always tried to justify its steps. Speaking after laying the foundation for the Parbatya Chattagram Complex in Dhaka on May 8, 2016, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said: 'We have removed most of the army camps from the hills. Only four brigades will remain in four places. We will withdraw the rest. We are setting up a cantonment in Ramu with that in mind'.¹⁸ Retired Major General Syed Mohammad Ibrahim, who had served as GOC in the late 1980s in the CHT, however, opposed the government's position, explaining: 'Army camps in the CHT make up the relationship between the government and the people. We were the witness to terrorism, hijacking and kidnapping in that area. We cannot easily understand the situation there without the army camps'.

Fear and distrust

After my arrival in the field, one day in November 2012, I had just finished conducting some interviews in the Shishirpur area and was heading back to my host's house in Kuturitola. While crossing the road that led to the house where I was staying, my acquaintance, a Karbary, joined me in walking up to the house. When I was talking to him, he offered to carry my bag. He said that the bag seemed rather heavy and asked me jokingly whether I chose the olive-colored bag on purpose to make the military happy as they have the same colored uniform. Then he suggested that the bag might make the people either frightened or nervous as the color of army uniform carries fear in the minds of indigenous people. They are psychologically frightened of this color as it reminds them of the severity of the violence they faced from soldiers dressed in the same color. Hence, if they see the same color worn or carried by a civilian they don't want to trust them because of the power of the army. My friend talks about symbolic violence as that which is exercised on a social agent with their complicity. It is the underlying sense of fear that violence and militarization evoke in everyday life amidst terror, and also speaks to the psychological impact/'trauma' of violence.

Fear, suspicion and distrust were ever-present among the respondents. Jamini Tripura, a 40-year-old woman, a member of Union Parishad and of middle socio-economic status, told me that in the mid-eighties when they were teenagers, at night when they saw the flashlight of the military jeep, everybody would be overcome with fear and they would just start running to save their lives. Even if it was a flashlight, they felt scared of the army. This fear persists even now. Seeing the light of army vehicles or personnel at night will make them feel uncomfortable and stop whatever they are doing until the lights disappear. This uncertainty has influenced them not to build permanent houses, something they desperately wish to do. Before the Accord, massacres were perpetrated by the army; after the Accord, arson took place instead of mass executions because the perpetrators were less visible. During the mass executions soldiers could be identified but in the case of arson, groups of people were involved.

In addition, she told me that even some Tripura, Marma and Chakma people who worked closely with the army would report to them about other members of their communities. She told me that violence not only affected themselves, it destroyed their relationships within and outside communities. They do not trust Bangalis, especially the settler Bangalis. They also do not trust their own people sometimes as they act against their own interests. Hughes¹⁹ discusses how denunciation destroys relationships of trust and perpetuates terror on the ground. Gellately and Fitzpatrick²⁰ show how denunciation/collaboration is a way in which the state imposes policing within communities in contexts of terror. By giving different fragments of Asha's life, Das firmly explores how the violence of extreme events such as Partition comes to be incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships and within the multiple weaves of daily life. Her case is very significant for my work as it helps to comprehend the experiences of indigenous women in the CHT by clearly acknowledging the subjectivity, the lived and imaginary experience, of the people involved. She addresses the way in which the atrocious and horrifying brutalities of Partition left a legacy of relationships marked by suspicion, bitterness and betrayal not only between Hindus and Muslims but also between men and women of the same community and even more in the same kinship groups or in extended families and networks. I consider this a very significant observation and one that I can draw from in terms of changing forms of kinship and other social relationships. When the government deploys ethnic minority soldiers to patrol the area after violence, the indigenous soldiers are placed in the wider project of state violence and militarization and it is important to see how it has implications in and out of the communities.

Sending indigenous soldiers to an indigenous area gives the idea that Bangali soldiers were no longer patrolling them, rather that their own people were doing the job, prompting the communities to start thinking that their own people were their enemy. They would no longer trust them thinking that they were serving army's interests against their own. In a changed situation where the military did not need to carry out excessive monitoring or violent control, local indigenous people took the task of imposing censorship and control over themselves. The color of my bag is sufficient for the people to feel that they are under surveillance. That suggests that the army has actually done a fairly substantial job of instilling fear but have cleverly, albeit sadistically, now placed themselves in a position where they no longer need to assert their physical presence as much. It puts a new twist on the idea of indigenous soldiers taking over the job of controlling the area. Some might argue that a Chakma soldier could be reassuring (surely a Chakma soldier will not carry out criminal acts against his own people, they might think), but this must be understood as a form of covert and tacit surveillance, in which the Chakma no longer know when they are being monitored. They are provided with constant reminders of military surveillance but the actual military are less present than before. They can no longer rely on other Chakma to stand by their own people, so it leaves them feeling more isolated and vulnerable than before. Even where the soldier was Chakma, the Marma people started whispering: 'Chakmas are like that. They can stand against their own people'. Therefore, I argue here that it is violence that changes relationships and introduces suspicion.

Discarding memory and suspicion

In all fields except Dhaka, at first, most of the women respondents were not that friendly and did not want to talk to me. Some of them told me that they had already forgotten about the incidents of violence. Some said that it was too painful for them to narrate. The most interesting aspect of this was that both men and women were discarding their narratives every day. They did not want other people to hear about them. It was not all about their shyness, it was about their general distrust of people, especially the Bangalis, and also their fear of the consequences. I was not allowed to record their voices with an audio recorder. They asked me not to turn it on and said that they did not feel comfortable with the recorder. They could not trust the recorder itself. They thought that it might reach the army. It took some time for them to open up, though this was not true for all. The respondents had various ways of expressing themselves. One Chakma woman respondent from the field of Shishirpur, a housewife of lower socio-economic status, said that if they told me anything about their situation it would mean that they were inviting enemies. From their point of view, it was better to remain silent if it meant avoiding future problems. As a Bangali researcher, they could not trust me, as their land had been seized by Bangali settlers. Some of them asked Monimala, who mostly accompanied me during my fieldwork, about me. When the respondents hesitated to talk to me, Monimala convinced them and made them understand about my research objectives and ensured them it would cause no harm to them.

She built a bridge between us to communicate. But some of them seemed scared while talking to me. Green states that fear destabilizes social relations by driving a lodge of distrust between members of families, between neighbors and among friends. Fear divides communities through suspicion and nervousness, not only of strangers but also of each other. When they started talking to me, I found some of them discarding their memories every day. They came to me and said that what they said to me the previous day was not true. They did not find me trustworthy since I was there for only a few days of my fieldwork, so they thought again about what they had said and when they feared that it might invite risk they recanted their stories. They were always in fear and it became clear to me that fear is the reality of their everyday lives. In addition, they also tried to go back to their own stories and negotiated with themselves every day. It was not easy at all for them to go back to those painful days and decide what they wanted to remember.

On the way to conduct an interview or while returning from one, I would recharge my mobile phone battery either in the market or in the house that had electricity. The only available phone networks in the area were Teletalk and Grameen. Despite the presence of the Kaptai Hydroelectric Dam, most of my field areas did not have electricity, except for a few houses of influential indigenous people. When mobile networks from various companies were introduced in Bangladesh in the late 1990s, the CHT was not included for a long time as it was considered a 'risky' and 'insecure' zone. Only army personnel could use phones in the cantonment area. But in cases of emergency, common people could also use the telephone after getting permission. But they had to always talk in the presence of army personnel so that the conversation did not remain private.

Also, since the army personnel could not understand ‘indigenous’ languages, only conversations in Bangla were permitted. One day I went to a neighbor’s house to get my mobile phone battery recharged. I was in a hurry as I had an appointment. A young man named Ajal asked me whether I was interested in listening to a funny story about mobile phones. Then Ajal narrated that about six years ago when he was a student at a college in Dhaka, his father went to the cantonment to call him for an emergency. Ajal answered the phone call and since it was from an unknown number, he asked who was calling him. His father replied in Bangla instead of Chakma language because of a military person standing in front of him. Ajal hung up because he could not even imagine that his father could speak Bangla over telephone.

Bhante²¹ advised me not to say anything over the phone about the CHT to my friends or others as the conversations would be recorded by the ‘supreme’ authority. They were not sure what they should or should not tell me. As Hughes argues, memory does not involve an abstract recording of the past, but is informed by the socio-political context of remembering. Some of them considered these memories as ‘secret stories’ of the family that was connected to family ‘honor’ in patriarchal Chakma, Marma or Tripura societies.

Self-surveillance

In the field, my respondents knew me as either a friend of Monimala or of her elder brother who was employed by the Task Force after studying in India. In the beginning, Monimala did not want to go outside with me. She would say that if she was seen with me going to different places, she would be a target of the military once I left the area. She observed my every move to find out if I was trustworthy. She also tried to learn about me from various sources to be sure that as a Bangali researcher I would not do them any harm. It was the third day when I asked Monimala to go with me for an evening walk. She refused and said that it would not be safe to go out in the evening since *Durgapuja* (Bangali Hindu’s biggest festival) was going on and that every year Bangali Muslim settlers tend to make *kawaz*²² or cause conflicts, during New Year’s celebration, known as ‘*Boi-Sa-Bi*’.²³ She added that seven years ago they boycotted *Boi-Sa-Bi* in protest against a Bangali attack on a *para*²⁴ in Khagrachari. Monimala seemed very scared during the time of my fieldwork since it was immediately after an incident that had taken place in Rangamati and everybody was afraid that the conflict might spread into areas of Khagrachari. She also advised me to tread carefully. She reminded me that I was not a local resident and that it was not the appropriate time to go around, especially in the evening. I found there was a quiet atmosphere everywhere, that people did not want to talk spontaneously.

Monimala later changed her mind for some reason and decided to go with me. Her house was located near a bazaar area called Kuturitola. The local Bangali people in the bazaar became very curious about me and asked me to stop by a tea shop run by a Bangali owner. In a small town everybody knew everybody. So they

easily understood that I was an outsider, who must be there for a particular reasons. Since I always wore a red *tip* ²⁵ they thought that I was a Hindu and exchanged greetings that are customary in a Hindu society. They asked me to sit down in the stall and enquired about my identity: Who was I? What was I doing? Where was my hometown? Why was I there? Why was I staying in a Chakma house? Was I Hindu or Muslim or Barua? They talked about Monimala's family and praised her father. But I realized Monimala did not like it. Her face turned pale. The entire time we spent in the tea shop Monimala kept to herself and was completely silent. While coming back from the tea shop, I asked Monimala why she was so silent and what had happened to her. She was hesitant to answer.

Being silent can act as self-surveillance as we understand that the strange proximity between the Panopticon and 'Big-Brother' is rooted in the understanding of self-surveillance not as care of the self, but as self-monitoring²⁶ or, as Norris and Armstrong ingeniously put it, as 'habituated anticipatory conformity'.²⁷ Although normalizing judgment can be understood as an infra-penalty that partitions an area that the law has left empty—the vast domain of gestures, attitudes, quotidian activities, tasks, discourses, uses of time, habits and so on—its real novelty resides in the fact that these micro-penalties are not addressed so much to what one does, but to who one is.²⁸ However, being silent to avoid further incidents was a means of covering up a sad incident in Monimala's family history.

It was about how her father died four years ago, and she firmly believed that the military was responsible. Her father was the owner of a *tilla* (a small hill) and one day during the caretaker government regime (2007–2008), he was asked to go to the cantonment. He went there and was informed that a Bangali person had filed a case against him claiming that the Bangali man was the rightful owner of the *tilla* and it would be wise for her father to leave. They later found out that the Bangali man²⁹ who filed the case was a former employee at their house. It was allegedly the military who had initiated the case using the name of that Bangali man, and they had also pressured him to build a bamboo house on the *tilla* to ensure control. Her father died of a heart attack two days after that incident. She said that her father was a brave man, but he died as a result of the stress of the threat from the army and because he could not bear the disgrace the situation brought on him. After meeting the army her father had sent Monimala to her uncle's house since he suspected something, and that was the starting point of Monimala's stay at her maternal uncle's house at Dighinala Bazaar. Her father thought that his family was being targeted by the military. Then her younger brother was sent to Malaysia for safety. Monimala's elder brother-in-law served as a policeman, having gotten the job as a returnee refugee. Her father invited him frequently to their house to find a way out of this situation and thought that maybe he could do something in this regard and the military would not disturb them when they saw policemen coming to their house frequently. Members of the family were scattered and they realized that the military wanted the hill at any cost.

Monimala said that her father had never faced such a situation before. And the Bangali man who used to work in their house came to them after the death of her

father and told them that he did not want to file the case against his old master as he loved him, but that the military had pressured him to do so. Interestingly, I heard a sympathetic note in Monimala's voice for the Bangali man when she said he did not have any other option than to do what the army asked, as he was threatened as well. Everybody was frightened of the army. The Bangali people always needed the army's support. The army manipulated and used the man to get the hill. The army and the Bangalis support each other and work against the indigenous people in the CHT. Monimala told me that in the refugee camp, though it was not a good life, she never felt insecure, but that in this *para* she felt insecure all the time. Their house could be burnt anytime if something ever happened between Pahari and Bangali people. She informed me that, now, nobody wanted to make a good home because of the uncertainty of life. She said to me, 'Who knows, maybe you cannot stay in our house if it is burnt tomorrow'.

The next day, Monimala and I went to Dighinala Bazaar that was seven miles from their house. It was late afternoon. We were buying biscuits when three boys came and approached Monimala. She had no clue what was going on. They were nearly dragging and pulling her. I was busy with making a payment but after seeing this I went to them and asked what was going on. Monimala identified herself as a college teacher. The boys told me that they were UPDF activists. They said that the area was controlled by the UPDF. They were Chakma. They said they did not want their women to go outside in the evening as it was not safe for them; girls and women of the communities were permitted to go out during the day, but they had to return by the evening. After that if somebody wanted to go out, they needed their permission. Since there was the possibility of an attack, they were trying to avoid all issues that might lead to conflict. On one hand, this move was taken to protect the women, but on the other hand, they were policing the women as they thought that the women of their own communities should only belong to them. The entire situation was tense and full of fear. Thus indigenous women are subjected to multiple forms of surveillance.

Semantic domination and protest

In areas inhabited by Chakma, Marma or Tripura, everybody tries to speak the majority language. For example, Chakma people will speak Marma in Marma areas. Only Santal people speak with other people in Chittagonian dialect. For them, if they cannot speak other languages, they will speak in Chittagonian dialect.³⁰ Bangalis impose majoritarian politics on indigenous minority people through language and religion; some of the majority Chakma people are doing the same thing on minorities among the indigenous groups to ensure power over them. They also try to dominate others through language in localities where they are a majority. As Scott³¹ argues, the potentially strategic element in appeals to hegemonic values is apparent from almost any setting of inequality; it follows from the domination of language.

However, they think that by protecting their language, they can make a strong protest against Bangali domination in the CHT. In the CHT Accord, under clause 33 (b), it is written that primary education should be conducted in the mother tongue. The government, however, had not taken any initiative to promote this. Some NGOs like Brac initiated pre-primary schooling in some of the indigenous languages. But in an analysis of this program by Brac, it can be seen that the initiatives were confined to the translation of Bangali poems and rhymes for children rather than using poems and rhymes written in the languages of the indigenous groups living in the CHT.

When I was talking to Youngruengin the yard behind her school, a Chakma boy named Barun sat down next to me. He joined in the discussion by sharing his own experience. He said that he had dropped out twice from the school. The first time it was a misunderstanding between the class teacher and him. He told me that in the Chakma language there is no division between the three distinct *Bangali* referential terms of address, 'tui', 'tumi' and 'apni'. The Chakma language has only one way of addressing a person, and that is 'tui'. When Barun was eight years old, he addressed his class teacher as 'tui'. But his class teacher was Bangali and could not accept that his student addressed him as 'tui' and beat him badly and for this reason he dropped out of the school.

While going to Jojeckchari by motorcycle with a friend, we stopped at a tea stall near the village we were heading to. The tea stall was under an old banyan tree. There are many small tea stalls on the road about every five kilometers, most of them owned by people from different indigenous communities. In the shop, some people were gossiping in the Marma language. One of them was Mong Thoi Prue. His Bangali name was Modon. He told me about his father and that his experience was common and had been occurring for a long time. He said that his father's name was Jibon Chowdhury. When his father was admitted to school, the teacher could not pronounce his name and called him Jibon. So, for Bangali people, his father's name was always Jibon Chowdhury. The people in the tea shop also told me that derogatory names which one community often used for another, such as Chakku for Chakma, Mogh for Marma and so on, were used as verbal abuse by security personnel on the streets. Scott³² said, when a commoner is addressing the sultan in Indonesia, he uses the term *hamba*, which translates roughly as 'your slave', and he was traditionally positioned before the throne in a posture of wretched humility. Every encounter that brings together people of different status in such societies is designed to underline and support those differences by rules of language, sign, tone and dress.

Naming can be considered a form of violence.³³ Among post-structuralist theorists this is an essential and commonly raised critical maxim. The act of naming can be a matter of forcibly impressing a sign upon a person or object with which it has only the most random of relationships. Names create an 'other', establish hierarchies, enable surveillance and establish violent binaries: naming is a strategy that one installs in power relations. The violence incises all levels, from the practically political ('They are savages', 'You are queer') to the ontological (one detractor writes of 'the irreducibility

of violence in any mark'). Discussing the naming practices of Nambikwara children in *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida³⁴ identifies naming as an act of 'originary violence' that is productive of both the disciplinary violence of the law and the cognate violence of its infractions: 'war, indiscretion, rape'. Naming is authority's attempt to classify and control disparity. For Derrida as for others, this is at the heart of post-structuralist logic.

On the contrary, by using the establishment language the indigenous people can avoid many unpleasant situations caused by the army and others. They communicate with themselves in their own language that the army cannot understand. And sometimes they pretend that they do not understand Bangla, especially when they are asked to do something that they really do not want to do. Subal Chakma, 52, from a middle socio-economic background and a male UP member, narrated:

It was a terrible incident that I cannot forget. It happened before we went to India in 1986... just one month before the Khagrachari incident where a series of massacres took place in the many areas of the CHT. We left the house when we came to know that the military was coming. They had some people who were working as informers and most of the time they acted like a beggar or a van puller. Outsiders could not recognize them. They were mostly associated with the SB [Special Branch of Police]. They used code language which we could not understand. One day my mother was alone in the house. At midnight the military came to our house and called us by our names. My mother opened the door and asked something in the Chakma language. The military asked about us, my mother could understand it but she kept on talking in her own language. Then the military shouted at my mother as they could not understand what she was saying. After 20 minutes the military finally gave up and left.

This story gives an idea how language can act as a form of protest or a tool to tackle a situation. Language is used as a tool of domination, just as it is used as a weapon of resistance. Scott³⁵ refers to the process by which Aesopian language may offer a means of direct vituperation, which is very much like the process by which everyday forms of struggle give way to overt, collective insolence.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that visible and invisible violence inflicted by the army and Bangali settlers have created an ecology of fear leading to distrust and suspicion in the CHT. It also shows that color itself symbolizes power when it is used by powerful agents of the state.

The self-surveillance of women in the CHT is analyzed here through the lenses of Foucault's theory, where self-control and being silent were used to avoid further violence. The forms of semantic domination are discussed and it is argued that language works simultaneously as a grammar of domination and resistance.

Notes

- 1 Soon after Bangladesh came into being in 1971, representatives of the CHT led by Manabendra Narayan Lama sought regional autonomy and recognition of the rights of the peoples of the region. These demands led to the formation of a political party of the indigenous people named Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) on February 15, 1972. However, the immediate reason for founding this party appears to have been the emergence of Bangladesh on the basis of Bangali nationalism. The hill people used to call themselves 'Jumma', not Bangali. They demanded autonomy and placed before the ruling Awami League government the following four-point demands: (i) declare Chittagong Hill Tracts as an autonomous zone with an assembly of its own; (ii) incorporate provisions in the constitution of Bangladesh similar to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Ordinance of 1900; (iii) recognize and maintain the offices of the tribal kings; and (iv) incorporate provisions in the constitution for safeguarding the autonomy of the CHT. The government viewed their demands as separatist and refused them constitutional recognition of their distinct identities. Then, from 1976 onwards the government's reaction was militarization and flooding the area with landless Bangalis from the plains. This triggered a 'Bangali-Pahari' (pahari meaning 'of the hill') problem in the form of 'majority-minority' discourse and resulted in large-scale displacement in the CHT of the indigenous communities. A sustained state policy of disparity and negligence on the issue of autonomy and constitutional recognition over the years has culminated in repression for decades (Meghna Guhathakurta, "Overcoming Otherness and Building Trust: The Kalpana Chakma Case" in Subir Bhaumik, Meghna Guhathakurta and SBR Chaudhury eds. *Living on the Edge. Essays on the Chittagong Hill Tracts* Kathmandu: South Asia Forum for Human Rights and Calcutta Research Group. 1997; Shapan Adnan, *Migration, Land Alienation, and Ethnic Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Research and Advisory services. 2004). This developed into a deep resentment among the indigenous peoples and they reacted to these repressive measures of the state with resistance that soon developed into an armed struggle. This was led by the Shanti Bahini, an armed group of the PCJSS and was in response to direct military intervention by the Bangladeshi army in the CHT. After nearly 10 years of peace talks, the government of Bangladesh and the PCJSS signed the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord on December 2, 1997, which ended two decades of armed conflict.
- 2 The military was mostly violent to the Chakma people as the ethnic minorities in the CHT were led by Chakmas.
- 3 *Khisa* is one of the four caste-based titles of the Chakma people.
- 4 There exists a power relationship between the indigenous groups living in the CHT. The military always tried to make the small groups work in their favour and they asked members of the small groups such as Murung or Khayang to work as spies on the activities of the Shanti Bahini or PCJSS. They were paid or given extra benefits. As a result of these initiatives taken by the army, *Mukhosh Bahini* (Masked group) emerged in the CHT in the mid-1980s. The objective was to create division among the indigenous groups to demolish their movement.
- 5 See Linda Green. *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
- 6 See Regina G Lawrence. *The Politics of Force: Media and the Construction of Police Brutality*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 175.
- 7 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2004.
- 8 Adi Bangali (refers to Bangalis who have been living in the CHT since the British colonial period), Settler Bangali (the ones who were brought to the CHT as part of the government's 'development program' started in 1979).
- 9 See Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds, eds. *Violence and Subjectivity*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- 10 Sherry B Ortner. 'Résistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 177.
- 11 Das, *Violence and Subjectivity*, 10.
- 12 Deepak Mehta. 'Circumcision, Body, Masculinity: The Ritual Wound and Collective' in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

- 13 Hille Koskela. 'The Gaze Without Eyes: Video-Surveillance and the Changing Nature of Urban Space.' *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 2 (2000): 259.
- 14 JA Margold. 'From "Cultures of Fear and Terror" to the Normalization of Violence.' *Critique of Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (1999): 63–88.
- 15 Michael Taussig. *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*. (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999).
- 16 Carina Perelli. 'Memoria de Sangre: Fear, Hope, and Disenchantment in Argentina' in *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Timespace*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- 17 Judith Zur. 'The Psychological Impact of Impunity.' *Anthropology Today* 10, no. 3 (1994): 12–17.
- 18 Bdnews24.com. 8th May, 2016. <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2016/05/08/frustration-rising-in-cht-over-slow-implementation-ofaccord-says-pcjss-chief-santu-larma> (accessed October 17, 2016).
- 19 Dhana Hughes. *Violence, Torture and Memory in Sri Lanka: Life after Terror*. (London: Routledge, 2013).
- 20 Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, eds. *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789–1989*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
- 21 Buddhist religious leader.
- 22 Quarrelling with loud voice which can lead to conflict and violence.
- 23 The festival is called 'Boisu', 'Sangrai' and 'Bijhu' in Tripura, Marma and Chakma languages respectively.
- 24 *Para* is a local term that indicates a specific locality.
- 25 A small round mark on a woman's forehead. In the Indian subcontinent it is a mark of beauty, not necessarily related to religion or marital status.
- 26 David Lyon. *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life*. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).
- 27 Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong. *The Maximum Surveillance Society: The Rise of CCTV*. (Oxford: Berg, 1999).
- 28 Michel Foucault. 'Governmentality' in Michel Foucault, *The Essential Works 1954–1984*, ed. J Faubion. (New York: The New Press, 1997).
- 29 Bangali Settler is not a homogenous category in the CHT. And all of them do not dominate the indigenous people. The people who were brought there as part of the government development program were poor. Some of them worked at the houses of upper socio-economic indigenous people and also ploughed the land owned by the indigenous people.
- 30 In Bangladesh, all sixty-four districts have their own dialect.
- 31 James C Scott. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 James R Dawes. 'Language, Violence, and Human Rights Law.' *Yale Journal of law and Humanities* 11, no. 2 (1999).
- 34 Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. Corrected Edition. Transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
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6

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Strategies for prevention

Maya Chadda

Independent India is no stranger to communal violence. The most recent large-scale riot occurred in September 2013 in and around the city of Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh.¹ In the two districts of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli, a toxic hate campaign based upon an allegation that Muslim boys were engaging in a 'love jihad' by enticing Jat Hindu girls into marriage, led to violent murderous attacks on Muslim settlements of mainly poor agricultural workers. The villages and small towns around Muzaffarnagar had no previous history of communal violence but its denizens suddenly found themselves bitterly divided, and fearful of living together as neighbors.² When the violence ended in 2013, over 200 people had been killed, women had endured sexual violence, thousands of homes and livelihoods had been destroyed and large numbers of people were forced to flee. More than two years later, most of them remain stuck in makeshift camps from which they are afraid to return home.

Religion-based conflict has been a sporadic but enduring feature of Indian history reaching back to colonial times and even before that to the Mughal period. The partition of British India was a prelude to independence, which created two separate but hostile nations, India and Pakistan. The partition precipitated a holocaust that killed nearly 1 million and displaced 12 million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs across the subcontinent. Close to 34 million Muslims, approximately 10.43 percent of the total population in 1951 remained behind in India.³ The partition and the carnage that accompanied it turned India and Pakistan into enemies. It had an equally disastrous effect on society and politics within India. The continued existence of a large Muslim minority severely strained India's integrative capacity as a nation-state. There was a short respite from Hindu-Muslim violence after independence, but the cycle of religious violence resumed its course in the 1960s.

The 1967 Ranchi riots caused 184 deaths. The 1969 Gujarat riots recorded 660 dead. The Moradabad riots recorded 400 dead.⁴ The 1983 Nellie massacre in Assam claimed 2,193 lives. The anti-Sikh riots in 1984 claimed 8,000. The 1985 Gujarat riots led to 275 deaths; the 1984 Bhagalpur riots killed 1,000; the 1987 Meerut riot killed 346; the Bombay riots of 1992–1993 led to 250 deaths. The 2002 Gujarat riots killed 1,044 men, women and children.⁵

Since the rise of the self-proclaimed ‘Hindu’ nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its affiliated organizations, religion-based riots have become more systematic and deadly. According to one report, in the eight years from 2005 to 2013, 1,000 communal incidents as well as clashes took place that left 965 dead, 18,000 injured and many more permanently displaced.⁶ The Ministry of Home Affairs reports that close to 20 percent of all India Hindu–Muslim violence occurred in one state alone, namely UP in the first five months of 2017.⁷ Uttar Pradesh is not only the most populated state within India but is historically the base of the Muslim League that had created the separate state of Pakistan.

The stubborn persistence of Hindu–Muslim violence, commonly referred to as ‘communal’ violence⁸ raises two broad questions: what accounts for its persistence and increased intensity since the late 1980s, and what are the strategies that can be deployed to reduce, if not prevent it? There is now a large body of literature examining religious violence in India.⁹ I will concentrate mainly on the second question. This chapter is devoted to an examination of key preventive strategies but some discussion of the diverse theoretical explanation of its causes is also necessary to fully grasp its significance. I have divided the discussion into three parts.

The first part provides a brief sketch of the Muzaffarnagar riot of 2013 and reconstructs its immediate as well as structural context. The second part deconstructs several key strategies employed so far. The third part reflects on what we still do not fully understand about violence in countries such as India, and what might work better to prevent conflicts in the future. I argue that there is no single cause of religious violence, and no single agency, or strategy, that can prevent or defuse it. The extant discussion of preventative strategies has addressed either the very long term or the immediate causes of conflict. What is needed is an interim strategy that brings together several agencies and actors in a ‘coalition of the willing’ to establish permanent institutional and psychological roadblocks in violence-prone towns and cities.

To do this, I have analyzed the Muzaffarnagar riot in detail. Apart from the fact that it spread to villages, the Muzaffarnagar riot is archetypal of the scores of riots that have occurred across India since the communal frenzy of 1947. There were two other exceptions, namely the 1980 riot in Bhagalpur and the Gujarat riot in 2002. These two previous communal episodes had also spread to the neighboring villages of Meerut and Ahmedabad but, for the most part, communal tensions and violent riots have remained restricted to cities and towns of India.¹⁰ The significance of this is discussed later, but that aside, the Muzaffarnagar riots have the same anatomy as the vast majority of the previous communal episodes in India. The purpose in this chapter is to describe how small events escalate into a large-scale communal riot, and explain what can be done to prevent it.

To understand the significance of such riots, we need to understand the social setting within which they have occurred. First, Muslims currently constitute close to 14 percent of the Indian population and are therefore a sizable minority within India. They live in concentrated pockets across India, but large areas of the country have no significant Muslim population. This asymmetric distribution has important implications for the frequency of tensions and outbreak of large-scale violent confrontation.

Second, the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for India's Muslim has produced an enduring challenge to India's capacity to integrate those who remained behind into a secular and egalitarian polity. Indeed, the post-partition story of Muslim integration is one of halting progress marred by frequent, unintended and unforeseen setbacks. The enshrinement of separate personal laws for religious minorities in the Indian constitution, which was intended to preserve religious and cultural pluralism, ended unfortunately by segregating the Indian Muslims from the Hindu mainstream. Over time, their minority status has made them vulnerable to crass political manipulation. The avowedly secular Indian National Congress (INC) party and the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh have used the Muslims as a vote bank. This has enabled the BJP to consolidate its political base by championing Hindu nationalism. In the process they have made Muslims their principal target.

Third, as the dominance of the Congress party in politics waned, the ambitions of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and its political offshoot, the BJP, to replace it and shape India in a 'Hindu' mold, was revived. It therefore challenged the Congress party's secular credentials while representing itself as the true and authentic spirit of 'Hindu' India. The various Commissions of Inquiry set up to investigate the causes of riots report attempts by Hindu nationalist organizations to mobilize popular anger by citing Pakistan as far back as 1967 and 1969. At that time, the memory of the second India-Pakistan war of 1965 was still fresh in the minds of the Indian public. But until the 1980s, the Hindu Nationalist parties – pushing for the Hindutva Ideology, which identified the Hindu religion, Hindi language and Hindu state as a single undifferentiated entity – had only an insignificant presence in Indian politics. The political demise of the Congress in the late 1980s created an opportunity for the Hindutva elements to gain prominence. This they did by espousing the demand to 'reconstruct' a Ram Temple at Ayodhya, which had, according to legend, stood at the precise spot where a Mughal general built a mosque in 1528–29, the Babri Masjid, dedicated to Babar, the first Mughal emperor of India. In the 1990s the Babri Masjid movement, as it came to be called, became a rallying point. The BJP sought to whip up popular frenzy around it to catapult itself in place of the rapidly weakening Congress party.

In December 1992, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) volunteers pulled down the Mosque but failed to turn it into a springboard for a 'Hindu' political renaissance.¹¹ The reverberations of that act in neighboring Pakistan

provided the RSS the starting point to enter the political mainstream. A spate of terrorist attacks inspired, and allegedly also organized, by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence upon civilian and religious locations culminated in a failed attempt to seize the Indian Parliament and hold its members hostage in 2001. But the attack added ammunition to the RSS anti-Pakistan, anti-Muslim propaganda. Gordhan Zadaphia, a former Minister of State for Home Affairs in Narendra Modi's first Gujarat government, who was later indicted for leading mobs in the Ahmedabad riots of 2002, directly blamed the Islamist terrorist for burning a train carriage carrying Vishwa Hindu Parishad cadres from the site of the demolished Mosque in Ayodhya. The VHP is an off shoot of the RSS. He told the *Indian Express* in an interview 'In Godhra an outside agency like the ISI was involved and it was a pure terrorist act.'¹² Since then, Pakistan has been an ever-present ghost in the Hindu nationalists' discourse and propaganda. Thus, for instance, during the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013, Sangeet Som, a BJP Member of Lok Sabha made several speeches linking UP's Muslims to Pakistan and vowed to 'send them back where they belonged.'¹³

Fourth, it is important to distinguish religious violence from other types of violence. Many India scholars believe that it is only one among several types of identity related violence. This chapter is based upon the belief that it is *sui generis*. Ethno-national insurgencies – of the kind that have occurred in Punjab, Kashmir, Nagaland, Mizoram and upper Assam – have sought to gain territorial control; caste violence has usually arisen out of land disputes, denial of entry to temples and public places, attempts to keep the lower castes 'in their place' and the violent reaction this has often caused. But a successful appeal to religion (while instigating violence) transcends other divisions by superimposing upon them. India's lower castes experience widespread discrimination in their daily lives from those who consider themselves to be Hindu Nationalists. But they do so within the Hindu universe. Muslims are not a part of this universe, so the 'Hindu Nationalists' see no contradiction between denigrating the lower castes and mobilizing them to fight the Muslims.

Fifth, Hindu-Muslim violence is not evenly spread through the country, but has been confined to specific riot-prone cities and small towns. The rural areas have remained, by and large, free from communal violence. An extensive study of Hindu-Muslim riots from 1947 to 1995 singled out the four most riot-prone states and eight such cities during this period.¹⁴ UP and Gujarat topped the list of the former. But in a 2008 report the Indian government added West Bengal, Assam and Kerala to the list.

Finally, there is an element of premeditation and organization behind most episodes of communal violence that is usually absent in other kinds of conflict. This was as amply evident in the Muzaffarnagar riots as it had been in the preceding episodes of communal violence. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates had made deep inroads in the villages around the city of Muzaffarnagar prior to the riot.

The Muzaffarnagar riot of 2013

It all began with a minor accident. The police report confirmed that on 27 August 2013 in Kawwal village in Muzaffarnagar, there was a motorcycle accident which led to a scuffle between the riders – two Hindu Jat youths named Sachin and Gaurav, and Shahnawaz, a Muslim youth residing in Shamali village. Sachin with his cousin Gaurav and a few others went into the Muslim enclave and stabbed Shahnawaz. Local onlookers managed to catch the two, even as the other killers escaped. Shahnawaz was rushed to a clinic, and when news came that he had succumbed to his stab wounds, the crowd killed the two Jat brothers.¹⁵ In fact, the first information report (FIR) filed with the police by the families of the murdered Jat boys mentioned only the motorcycle accident involving Shahnawaz and Sachin. But the Jat community justified the behavior of the two Hindu youths by claiming that Shahnawaz had been stalking Sachin's sister.¹⁶ Soon enough, this justification became linked to the mega narrative of 'Love-Jihad' that had been spreading across India previously, but particularly in the riot prone states of Kerala, UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

The patriarchal Jat community in Muzaffarnagar was rapidly mobilized against the Muslims who were supposedly dishonoring their women. The subtext implicit in this narrative touched upon several inter-related themes: that the Hindu *Dharma* (religion) was in peril, that Muslims were conniving and assaulting Hindu women and Hindu Jat honor, that this was part of a grand conspiracy to alter the demographic balance in the country and to eventually snatch it away from the Hindus who were the real heirs to the nation. Above all, the notion of Jat honor was linked to Hindu honor and the masculinity of Hindu nationality.

The report of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM report, September 2013) stated that Shahnawaz's father had denied the allegations of teasing and reported that there was a scuffle over the minor motorcycle accident that had escalated into a fight.¹⁷ The next day, says the report, people returning after the cremation of the Jat men, set fire to a hutment in a brick kiln, and damaged 27 Muslim houses in the Kawaal village. As tension grew, a Muslim gathering took place in Muzaffarnagar town area on August 28 ostensibly to restore calm. However, many inflammatory speeches were made in the gathering.¹⁸ The police could have, but did not, arrest the Muslim individuals responsible for Sachin's murder, just as they had failed in the case of arresting and detaining those who had escaped after murdering Shahnawaz. The FIRs had been filed with the police and that is as far as it went.

After the condolence meeting of the Mallik brothers in a nearby village called NanglaMandaur on August 31, a car carrying Muslim passengers was attacked and burnt and the passengers badly beaten. Some more incidents of attack on Muslims were reported from Muzaffarnagar as well. On September 7, a *mahapanchayat* (grand assembly) was called in NanglaMandaur, where more than 40,000 men (mostly Jats) gathered. According to the NCM report, participants en route to the *mahapanchayat* were assaulted in the Muslim majority village of Bassi Kalan, causing the tensions to rise even further. The report states that the inflammatory speeches made at the

mahapanchayat led to a Muslim bus driver being beaten to death. A Muslim crowd waylaid the attendees (largely Hindu Jats) returning from the *mahapanchayat* at a local canal bridge and in the ensuing violence, six people died.

There are two different versions of what actually transpired at the *mahapanchayats*, one held by the Muslim community and the other by the Hindu Jats. Each claimed that the other was the first to commit violence. The National Minority's Commission (NMC) report suggests that the September 7 *mahapanchayat* was held despite a prohibitory order, which the UP state government under Samajwadi Party (SP) had failed to enforce. Those leading the *mahapanchayat* meeting were local leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP members of Lok Sabha such as Sangeet Som who is notoriously anti-Muslim), a former Congress Member of parliament Harendra Malik and Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leaders Naresh Tikait and Rakesh Tikait. The BKU is a breakaway faction of the former Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) founded by Chaudhari Charan Singh in the 1970s.¹⁹ There are accounts that the Jats who went to attend the September 7 *mahapanchayat* raised provocative slogans as they passed by Muslim habitations. Provocations like dogs being dressed in a burqa and beaten with slippers were on display along with slogans like – 'Musalmanoke do sthan – Pakistan ya kabristan' (there are only two choices for Muslims: Pakistan or cemetery).²⁰ The violence soon spread to rural areas, especially to the villages of Kutba, Kutbi, Lank, Lisad, Baawadi, Phugana, Kakra, Kharad, Mohammadpur and Atali.

Meanwhile, the Samajwadi Party-led state government was busy changing the district magistrate (DM) and superintendent of police (SP) ostensibly to gain a semblance of control over the violence. It changed these officials three times during August and September, the two months when violence was at its peak. The National Commission on Minority (NCM) reports records 65 murders and around 51,000 people fleeing their homes to safety.²¹ But in the months that followed, more killings were to occur.

After the riots, the state government set up relief camps for the riot victims. Six months later there were still 51,000 people in the camps. The figures on the total number of people killed during the riots differs somewhat but according to government statistics reported in the *Hindustan Times*, in the first nine months of 2013, a total of 107 people were killed of which 66 were Muslims and 41 Hindus. In India as a whole, these same nine months registered 479 riots with 1,697 people including 794 Hindus, 703 Muslims and 200 police officials injured.²²

Preconditions for escalation of violence

As the Muzaffarnagar episode shows, at least three elements have to be present for communal tensions to become a riot.

First, mutual hatred has to be deliberately manufactured. As explained above, the areas around Muzaffarnagar had no history of communal violence. Hatred had to be created and the three campaigns – GharWapsi, Love Jihad and the Cow protection movement along with the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu Nationalist organizations in 1992 – had already prepared the grounds for religious polarization.

Love Jihad propagated the idea that Muslim men enticed, even abducted, innocent Hindu girls to convert them to Islam. The alleged purpose is to dishonor Hindus and to expand the Muslim population. 'Love Jihad' became the justification for the murder of Shahnawaz and attacks on Muslims in general. The GharWapsi²³ (meaning 'Back to Home') is a series of religious conversion activities, facilitated by Hindu organizations – Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and RSS – that have invented rituals to purify and convert non-Hindus (Muslims and Christians) to Hinduism. These organizations argue that the Muslims and Christians have proselytized and used enticements, even force, to convert a large number of Hindus to Islam and Christianity. The Christian missionaries, it is pointed out, were protected and encouraged by the British colonial authorities while the Mughals had converted Hindus to Islam by force.²⁴ The 'GharWapsi' was justified as a response to these foreign (Christian and Muslim) conspiracies that weakened Hindus and India. The cow is regarded as a scared animal in Hindu religion, and cow slaughter is therefore forbidden in many parts of India.²⁵ The Human Rights Watch reports a surge in cow vigilante violence since 2015.²⁶ Between May 2015 and April 2017 the campaign against beef consumption has led to the killing of at least ten Muslims in seven separate incidents of mob violence. It is estimated that 200 such vigilante groups are active in the Delhi-National Capital Region alone. These groups admit to feeling 'empowered' by the victory of the Hindu nationalist BJP in the 2014 election.²⁷

Second, there must be some organization and ready recruits that can be deployed to execute the riot. Jagpal Singh writes that until the mid-1980s the RSS was an urban organization in UP but by the 1990s it had begun to penetrate the villages.²⁸ During the 1990s, it mobilized Hindus across castes to construct the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the site of a 16th-century Mosque. The Mosque was destroyed in a violent confrontation between the agitators and the police, but the subsequent fall out was even worse. It precipitated the 2002 riot in Ahmedabad.

The RSS and VHP have generally found recruits for their causes among middle and higher castes in the caste hierarchy. Such new recruits at the village level have been employed to propagate and publicize the Hindutva agenda. They are expected to expand the network of loyal supporters. The GharWapsi, Cow protection, and Love Jihad movements have been critical in establishing village units (sakha) at the grassroots level. Several shakhas constituted the next level of RSS organization, namely, a mandal. Several mandals made up the branch covering an entire district or at least a large part of the state. The Gujarat riot started in the city of Ahmedabad but spread to rural Gujarat precisely because there were already such riot specialists and muscle men embedded in Gujarat's shakhas and mandals of the RSS, and its political front, the BJP. Jagpal Singh's field research shows that the RSS began to penetrate western UP around the same time as the Ayodhya movement was roiling UP in the early 1990s.²⁹

A failure of law and administration machinery is the third condition that can make a small incident escalate into a large-scale riot. Almost all Commissions of inquiry following episodes of communal violence point to state's inaction, tardiness, complacency and at times outright complicity, as the main reasons why riots occur and violence spreads. Other commentators reject what they consider

excessive focus on the state and instead suggest economic rivalries, political competitions and absence of civil organizations as the reasons why riots occur. It is to the discussion of these two genre of preventive measures we turn next.

Preventive strategies

1 *The law enforcement perspective*

In its 2008 guidelines, the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Central government urges the state's administrative agencies to remain alert and routinely collect all intelligence about potential conditions of communal disputes, whether over land and monuments, routes of procession, changes in the demographic balance, campaigns of conversion or activities of communal organizations.³⁰ It further advised that police posts should be set up in all riot prone areas and manpower and technical requirements (vehicles, weapons equipment for videography) periodically assessed. The guidelines required setting up standard operating procedures and contingency plans in the event of a riot and effective intelligence gathering frequent visits by the 'cop on the beat' and the district administrative officers in communally sensitive areas. Finally, the guidelines advised the state governments to set up a nodal cell as a clearinghouse for gathering all intelligence and reports on the past events and communally sensitive areas within the state.

The composition of the riot victims also reveals the critical role a state can play in protecting Muslims and their properties. Almost all the Hindu Jats who were killed in the Muzaffarnagar riot had participated in the *mahapanchayat* at Nangla-Mandaur village on September 7. They had shouted provocative slogans while passing the Muslim neighborhoods.³¹ An independent citizen's inquiry into the riot reported that even individuals sympathetic to the Hindu nationalist cause admitted that 'these youth have been taken in by the charisma of Modi and they raised slogans in his support' on the way to the *mahapanchayat*.³² The only incident of a planned attack by Muslims on Hindu Jats 'took place at PurBaliyan on September 7th in which some Mullejats wanted to attack the trolley of Jats from Sohram village out of rivalry borne by a previous incident. However, in the melee of the violence the Jats in the trolley of Kakda village got killed. But none of the Jats from PurBaliyan village itself were attacked by Muslims.'³³ On the other hand, the 'attacks and deaths of Muslims' were 'part of a sustained campaign in different villages. The victims were all innocent lower class Muslims who had no role' in attacks on September 7.³⁴ 'The handwork of the larger communal design and organization was evident in the well-rehearsed arguments which the Jats from different villages put forward to rationalize the killings and the displacement of the Muslims. A Jat teacher in Kakda village described communal violence in the region as – "Yehhai Amit Shah ka jadoo (translation: this is Amit shah's magic)". The Qutba village had been 'witness to a Panchayat that was attended by the BJP President Mr. Rajnath Singh about 6 months back. This points to the forces that have been at work in the area.'³⁵

Had the state government enforced its ban on the two *mahapanchayats* in August and September of 2013, the violence might not have escalated. While the police failed on every score – intelligence gathering, frequent monitoring, taking firm action at the first hint of communal events, and assessing the situation frequently by drawing on the reports of the ‘beat cop’ – the communal forces were well armed with dedicated cadres to turn a scuffle into a riot. A study of several past reports also shows the same pattern. Almost any small incident – a procession through other community’s neighborhood, loud speakers screaming Hindu or Muslim religious messages or songs, eating of beef by Muslim neighbors – can lead to a riot. Jagpal Singh’s study shows how the RSS’s penetration of village and districts in western UP led to the Muzaffarnagar riot.³⁶

Most importantly, the Sahai commission on the Muzaffarnagar riots, the Sri Krishna Commission after the Bombay riots of 1992–1993, the Nanavati Commission after the Gujarat riot of 2002, emphasize the pernicious role of the media in aggravating the riot by biased reporting and rushing to conclusion. For example, several newspapers and TV stations reported that Shahnawaz had been stalking Sachin’s sister, which proved to be totally false. The young woman in question stated that she had never visited the Kawwal village and did not know Shahnawaz. The social media has also served the cause of bigotry and incitement. The BJP Member of parliament Sangeet Som put up a doctored video that showed two Hindu men being killed by a Muslim mob. As it happens, this entire video was completely fabricated but it did what it was meant to do: ignite passions and hatred against Muslims. By the time the truth about the video came out, it was too late. Another local BJP leader, Yogi Adityanath (who is currently the chief Minister of UP), wanted the Muslim places of worship to feature Hindu deities. ‘If given a chance, we will install statues of Goddess Gauri, Ganesh and Nandi in every mosque,’ he was quoted as saying at the Vishwa Hindu Parishad’s Virat Hindu Sammelan in Varanasi.³⁷ He issued a warning that if one Hindu was killed, 100 Muslims would die in retaliation.³⁸ The newspapers and their hasty or false reporting had a lot to answer for in inflaming communal passions. Writing on the Bombay riots of 1992–93 the Srikrishna Commission comments that the ‘propaganda unleashed by Hindu communal organizations and writings in newspapers like *Saamna* and *Navakal*’ led to widespread rioting and murder of over five hundred Muslims.³⁹

The Sri Krishna Commission recommendations urged extensive reforms in the police and judicial bodies and punishment and expulsion of any government employee complicit in a riot. It stressed the need to make law enforcement agencies free from political interference and underscored the dangers in making the local police an extension of the ruling party and government in power. The commission also noted the role of the media and press in spreading rumors and inciting mobs into frenzied activities. In comparison, the Sahai Commission’s recommendations were only mildly critical of the state government. In any event, they were confined to legal/administrative measures. The commission’s report concentrated on what the state can do when violence breaks out, it did not deal with the historical,

socio-economic and deeply political dimensions of communal violence. As this chapter argues, these dimensions are critical to an understanding of strategies that can prevent Hindu-Muslim violence. It is to these we turn next.

2 Democracy, economy, civic bodies and party competition

The second set of strategies focus on social conditions and political and economic causes of violence. Ashutosh Varshney, Steven Wilkinson, Atul Kohli, Donald Horowitz, Paul Brass and Jagpal Singh (who has effectively applied Paul Brass's arguments to the Muzaffarnagar episode) in their writings have urged long-term reforms to prevent religious violence in India.⁴⁰ Their recommendations call for a deepening of substantive democracy, the creation of vibrant inter-religious civic associations or greater plurality of political parties and the creation of institutions such as a consociational political system for power sharing and local self-government. They argue essentially in favor of deepening democracy and making it more inclusive while ensuring an equitable distribution of political and economic power. The coalition strategy I have proposed combines elements of both law enforcement and civil society organization.

In these scholarly tracts, civic organization and political institutions play a key role. Ashutosh Varshney, for instance, argues that on its own and free from popular pressure, the state was unlikely to act with speed and dispatch or remain above partisan politics.⁴¹ Based on opposite pairs of violent prone and violence free cities with comparable social milieu, Varshney concludes that 'pre-existing local networks of civic engagement between the Hindu-Muslim communities are the single most important predictor of whether a community will respond violently to ethnic provocations.'⁴² Varshney found that communities that are most peaceful had local associations that made their members aware of the dangers of ethnic violence and worked to suppress the violent and criminal elements interested in exploiting ethnic antipathies. Local civic associations – including trade unions, professional organizations and political parties – whose members cut across ethnic lines were effective in killing rumors, improving communication and exerting pressure on violent elements at the local level.

Strategies that focus on issues of equal status and representation for the minority are a variant on the 'deepening democracy' theme. Khushwant Singh has argued for a greater percentage of Muslim recruitment in police and law enforcement.⁴³ A slightly different emphasis emerges in Atul Kohli's reasons why violence and conflict occurs. He traces these to the decay of political institutions, endemic corruption and political interference leading to the decline of state capacities. Kohli therefore recommends strengthening governance mechanisms and introducing measures to make institutions free of partisan interference.⁴⁴ Donald Horowitz, a leading scholar of ethnic conflict places his faith in 'multi-polar fluidity' that is in existence of a variety of cleavages, which cancel out and prevent rival religious communities from violent clash. He observes that Lucknow and Calicut were free of Hindu Muslim cleavage because cleavages of a different kind took precedence.⁴⁵ Civic association alone did not maintain the peace and were not the explanation for why these cities were more peaceful. Obviously, Horowitz thinks Varshney's faith in civil society organization as

the single most important preventive strategy is misplaced. In Lucknow the Sunni-Shia divide blunted the edge of Hindu-Muslim divide while in Calicut, a town in Kerala, the presence of a large Christian community prevented polarization strictly along Hindu-Muslim lines.

Jagpal Singh favors Paul Brass's explanation of a riot system but adds an economic dimension to explain how and why the Muzaffarnagar riot occurred. Singh underscores two key contradictions created by the success of the Green revolution in Western UP, which led eventually to the violence in Muzaffarnagar. 'One was the rise of new social classes/groups, and the second was the changing nature of rural-urban contradictions.'⁴⁶ In the pre-Green revolution years the farmers had to sell their grain to traders who generally lived in the towns and cities of UP. Following the Green revolution, the urban trader was replaced by the state. The farmers sold their grain directly to the state and also looked to the state agencies to provide all manner of extension services (credits, price support for crops, and hybrid seeds).⁴⁷ The second contradiction developed between farmers and cattle traders.⁴⁸ Singh writes, 'The farmer bought healthy young milk cows from the cattle trader while selling him the old ones. The cattle trader pruned the cattle population by sending the old cattle to slaughterhouse.'⁴⁹ Since the communal polarization in UP, and its vigorous espousal of the cow vigilante movement by the VHP, this traditional relationship and interdependence between Hindu and Muslim farmers and traders has become fraught with tension. The closer rural-urban dependence in the post-Green revolution decades has made it easy to export the institutionalized riot system from cities and towns to the villages.

Steven Wilkinson's study of riot torn cities in India establishes a causal connection between party competition and minority interests.⁵⁰ In Wilkinson's view, the greater the number of effective parties competing for power in a state, the more valuable minority voters become. This has long been true in Southern India. For example, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have the lowest levels of Hindu-Muslim violence largely because of cross cutting cleavages created by the emergence of middle and lower caste-based parties, strong party competition and frequent changes in the governing party. A minority was better protected when it constituted a swing vote in highly contested competitive elections. The existence of multiple parties in the UP – the SP, the BJP and BSP and the Congress – did not however protect the minorities in the ten districts of UP where riots occurred.

Why the above strategies might not work

While the above proposals provide valuable insights into the causes of religion-based violence and ways to defuse and prevent them, their single cause and a single agency focus is misleading. Why proposals depending exclusively on civic organization or the state or restoration of equity and representation will not work warrants an explanation. Similarly, it must be explained why we need an interim strategy that combines short-term law and order proposals with measures to strengthen civil society interventions. An analysis of the above strategies shows the importance of building a violence control system that extends

vertically through state and national government as well as horizontally into a coalition of civil society and party organizations.

Reliance on the state alone is hazardous as the first genre of strategies – the Sahai Commission and Sri Krishna Commission of Inquiries – show. While the Sri Krishna Commission's was harshly forthright holding the state, the police and administrative officials responsible for the 1992–1993 Bombay riots, the Sahai Commission report in contrast was only mildly critical of the UP State Government.

Dissatisfaction with the Sahai report led several independent fact-finding missions. One such mission led by Harsh Mander (referred to as *Mission*) credited the Sahai Commission for acknowledging the false charges of 'eve teasing' against Shahnawaz, who was stabbed to death and agreed that the video uploaded by BJP leader Sangeet Som was actually about an incident of lynching that took place in Pakistan and not India, and that the victims of lynching were not the two Jat youths that Sangeet Som claimed. The Mission also praised the Sahai Commission for dismissing the falsehood circulated before the *mahapanchayat* (September 7, 2013) that Muslims had slaughtered hundreds of Jats and thrown their bodies into a canal, and for recognizing that this rumor proved to be the final provocation leading to the communal violence.⁵¹

But the Mander report criticizes the Sahai Commission for giving greater weight in its assessment to the events put out by the Hindu Jat leaders. According to the *Mission*, the Sahai Commission was biased in accepting 'without evidence' the charge that Muslim youth in general did tease Jat girls. Nor did the Commission acknowledge that the few acts of Muslim violence were in reaction to the 'threatening slogans' and large-scale attacks on the Muslims. The *Mission* report concludes that the Sahai Commission had let off the Samajwadi Party state government with a just a light rap on the knuckles. If truth be told, the state government's inaction was tantamount to a 'criminal mishandling' of the entire situation. The *Mission's* fact-finding report disagreed with Justice Sahai's assessment that the state administration had done all that was possible to control the violence.⁵²

Civil society-dependent proposals are equally problematic. The first question one might ask of Varshney's proposal is: what explains the weakening of pre-existing communal ties, and if weakened, how can we rebuild such ties in middle of a riot? Second, how do we predict who will prevail in the tug of war between civic associations on the one hand and ambitious politicians on the other, particularly when the latter are bent on mobilizing support with appeals to religious sentiment? Following Varshney's arguments we are compelled to conclude that if peace held, civic associations are strong, but if peace failed, they are weak. That does not take us very far in predicting where and when riots might occur or how to rebuild civic associations once riots have broken out. It is possible to argue that peace might hold even if civic associations are weak, or the 'triggering event' is not emotionally potent enough to get the public riled up about alleged actions of a rival community.

We need to consider two additional questions as we look at the role of civic associations: what kind of civic associations can a deeply prejudiced and divided civil society produce? There is good reason to believe that in India's segregated society, communities will not be free from prejudices. Although local dynamics is

paramount, community perceptions might become linked to national ideologies. The resulting violence then becomes symbolic of a community's identity and its vengeance.⁵³ The Love Jihad, Cow Protection and beef ban movements and the GharWapsi conversions, were meant to first link local events to the RSS ideological agenda of Hindutva and second, connect the local level RSS and VHP cadres to these organization's headquarters in UP.

Can common economic interests of Hindus and Muslims triumph over the votaries of violence? Jagpal Singh's field study tells us how economic transformation can weaken economic interdependence between Hindus and Muslims. His description of how hostility and suspicion replaced common bonds between Hindu farmer and Muslim cattle trader in UP is telling. The cow protection vigilantes took to attacking Muslim homes and beating up cattle traders without inviting punishments. The economic elements that contribute to making a riot are well explained in the literature describing the 1969 Ahmadabad riots. The Hindu criminal elements in the city incited a riot to replace Muslim hold over smuggling and illegal trade in liquor. But economic rivalry was not the reason for the riot in Muzaffarnagar. Even Jagpal Singh rejects the economy as a trigger to the riots although he explains how agrarian transformation had weakened the traditional bonds of interdependence between Hindu and Muslim communities in UP.

Steven Wilkinson argues that political leaders will hesitate to trigger or encourage riots if minority voters occupy significant positions in electoral calculations and presumes the presence of a minority community in significant numbers in a state will make a difference in elections. In addition, this minority must be united and well organized in a single bloc to become a swing vote. He also assumes that no party will make minorities a target of hate campaigns. This combination of factors is present only in some parts of India. At least two conditions he puts forward were present in western UP: competition among several political parties (the Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the BahujanSamaj Party); and the Muslims constituted a significant minority. The Muslims did in fact carry the swing weight in many districts of Western UP. But these advantages did not protect them from the violence.

A coalition strategy: an alternative preventive measure

The second genre of strategies envisages a deepening of democracy, greater accountability, balanced party competition and a vigilant and unbiased public. Undoubtedly, more democracy is in itself highly desirable, but the procedures of democracy have an ambiguous relationship with violence, at least in South Asia. Frequently, democracy has meant more competition for office, power and control over resources of the state. Democracy then tends to be contentious and in a segmented setting of India, can lead to violence. While this is true, it is also true that violence has a pattern, and an identifiable political geography. It does not occur everywhere, all over India or occur all the time. This underscores the need to disaggregate the geography of violence to build preventive procedures for riot prone areas. Almost all scholars mentioned previously, agree with this fact.

Similarly, while the local state is frequently complicit in violence, structures beyond the immediate area are not usually implicated in the violence. If the local constabulary is incapable of performing free of bias and if the local politicians are a party to violence, the Central Reserve Police Force or constabulary from other states could be deployed. The CRP has a reputation for relatively effective and non-partisan enforcement of law and order. While in the short run these can restore order, the longer-term measures call for reforming the police and strict measures to establish accountability.

The desegregated geography of violence suggests that it is possible to undertake an interim set of actions, and build a mechanism that can alert state agencies beyond the affected areas at the first hint of communal tensions. Since riots escalate when they become linked to a wider circle of actors and demography, preventive strategies should create coalitions of multiple actors, positioned at different levels of society ranging from the national agencies to local state level agencies. These actors must have real constituencies in political parties and civic groups that are opposed to religious polarization.

The answer to religious violence is in preemptively building and activating, when required, vertical and horizontal coalitions of anti-riot interests and support groups in bureaucracy, citizenry, business associations and law enforcement agencies. These coalitions are vertical in that they include both the central state and local bodies; they are horizontal in that they include civic associations, community organizations, cultural clubs, citizen's committees and business and student associations. It is imperative that such coalitions focus on preventing the second stage of retaliation. To counteract complicit or partisan behavior, the state and civic agencies should create a mechanism to monitor each other. Such coalitions are not unknown in India, but unfortunately they have emerged on an ad hoc basis and are activated only after the frenzy of killings and destruction of property have occurred. For coalitions to be effective, they must be in place and activated as soon as a situation displays potential for violent escalation.

Brass's seminal work on Hindu-Muslim violence underscores the importance of such an anti-riot coalition in which the state forges a partnership with the civic associations and anti-violence constituencies. Brass's fieldwork and interviews in two instances of riots in the city of Kanpur is instructive of how violence can be prevented. He found that riots are produced by precipitating events that generates a chain, 'if not contained immediately will lead to a major conflagration.'⁵⁴ He found that the absence of a second stage reaction prevented further violence. When the respondents were asked why they refrained from second stage retaliation, the answer invariably was that they felt a sense of trust in the state government and in the local authorities that the situation would be brought under control. A combination of threats, 'both from another group and from the state and the authorities is required or is at least contributory to the movement of a riot into the dynamics of a chain reaction.'⁵⁵ It then follows that if the police act with speed and dispatch – banning processions, preventing emotionally charged public rituals, quickly arresting 'troublemakers' – who are the riot specialists to use Brass's term – the chain can be broken. In other words, the

police, the parties and the state at both the local and national level must be involved in stopping the violence. If the local authorities fail, the national authorities must rapidly step in to fill the power vacuum and watch over the actions of local authorities. Who will make them do this? This is where the horizontal coalition of anti-violence interests and constituencies become critical. They will make the political parties, state authorities and even the national government pay the price for neglect.

Also, it is important that the national authorities do not interpret local violence in millennial terms. The Muzaffarnagar riots occurred a few months before the 2014 national elections and when the BJP was poised to oust the Congress Party from government. The Muzaffarnagar riot of 2013 was a prelude to the national elections in 2014. It was in fact a trial run for assessing the potential payoff from communal polarization in UP and elsewhere. The slogans identifying Muslims with Pakistan and terrorism were critical to the BJP's victory in the 2014 national elections. The BJP succeeded because it was able to portray itself as the authentic voice of the majority in India. This linking of the local and national in a coherent narrative is the key to why isolated events may or may not become large-scale riots. Paul Brass argues that the public response to Ayodhya was enthusiastic in 1992 while attempting to mobilize the public around the killing of Kala Baccha in Kanpur two years later failed miserably. The killing of Kala Baccha was not connected to any large historical memories or events. Kala Baccha had been a criminal boss turned politician. The public simply saw through BJP attempts to whip up popular sentiment and did not respond to it.⁵⁶ The Ayodhya movement became the grand narrative for claiming India for the Hindus, its true and arguably only primogenitors.

Is the Indian state capable of building such coalitions and undertaking the necessary reform of police and other state agencies? And if it needs to be forced into enacting reforms, can the Indian democracy generate sufficient popular pressure to push for them? Answers to each question will depend on how one characterizes the Indian political system, its central state, the center-state relations and India's competitive party democracy. Such a discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter but a few passing observations might be relevant.

There is first no consensus among observers of Indian politics about the nature of an Indian state or its democracy. I would argue that the Indian state is not a homogenous monolith, but a congeries of many conflicting factions and interests. It is important to therefore guard against a simplistic connection between state weakness and communal violence. Even a weak state can call upon higher-level elements of law enforcement to curb violence, while a strong state might not be able to prevent it if it failed to respond promptly or indulged in political maneuvering.

Communal violence might be prevented or ended quickly (irrespective of the strength of the local and state structures) if there is an anti-riot mechanism already in place that can be activated at the first hint of tensions. A study of several riot episodes shows that while some elements of the state and its agencies can be biased, others that can also impose law and order are not complicit but simply confused. It is possible therefore to build a coalition of interested segments that would support reform and checkmate local riot systems by joining other segments within the state

that are opposed to the weakening of political institutions. Such a coalition of interests could be reinforced by generating a degree of discrete support from those in civic society most hurt by violence.

After all, the number of individuals benefiting from the corrupt local nexus of politicians, police and criminal elements that constitute a riot-ready system, is still a minority. And the central government and its policing and administrative arms may have little to gain from local riots. If that is not the case, then all is lost. But at least in some situations both these agencies can act in tandem as an arm of the anti-riot system. Can the coalition of anti-riot forces, official and civic, become stronger than those benefiting from riots in riot-prone cities and towns of India? The answer depends on the system of incentives and reward created to set up a permanent anti-riot network.

Conclusion

The forgoing discussion on strategies to prevent communal violence shows that such conflicts have a subtext: economic inequalities, social discrimination and victimization. Once violence breaks out, as it did in Kawwal village, the Muslims in the entire region around Muzaffarnagar became a target for the newly created network of the VHP and RSS recruits. The violence spread because a local incident was deliberately linked to national narratives promoting pogroms against Muslims. Violence was justified as 'setting right the historic wrong' or simply as revenge for some previous act of violence. Had there been a 'coalition' of elements that had little to gain from the violence – and therefore acted as a tripwire at each level of escalating violence – the small accident in Kawwal village would not have unleashed the cycle of killing and retaliatory murders. Since the political climate can change over time as will the leadership at center and state levels, this 'coalition' needs to be institutionalized with a set protocol that is activated at the first hint of trouble.

The most important precondition for such a coalition to succeed is to make it as free as possible of political manipulation for immediate gains. In addition, an independent body appointed by the government must carry out a regular audit to ensure that the mechanism for violence prevention is properly funded and manned at all levels and the relevant state agencies – police, judiciary and administrative officers – are duly cognizant of their powers and duties. If there are lapses, these must be immediately and severely punished. Ultimately, only the state has the legitimate monopoly of force and punishment. If used judiciously, and without delay, the incidence of communal violence in India can be reduced, if not eliminated.

The questions, however, remain as to why preventive strategies have failed in the past and why even the coalition strategy proposed here offers, at best, an imperfect solution to violence? The answer lies in the contradictory forces of history reinforced by the process of modernization. Modernization has unleashed new groups and new identities that are frequently mutually conflictual, as evident in India. Nor has electoral democracy satisfied rising expectations for a better life. The process of modernization implies a triumph of rationality over narrow claims of parochial and primordial

identities. The study of social violence in India and elsewhere shows that modernization has brought more, not less, violence in its wake; the march to individual freedom has been a mixed blessing and at times, a serious disadvantage.

Juergensmeyer, Nandy and Chatterjee in fact, argue that the modern Indian state has produced predatory structures within a spiritual vacuum.⁵⁷ The state's modernist and secular declaration prevents it from drawing on the embedded traditions of tolerance and coexistence rooted in the subcontinent's many religions. Alienated from everything that can provide a sense of self-worth, a modern urban, middle class Indian is ready fodder for communal nationalism, whether Hindu or Islamic. For this set of scholars, Gandhian politics that combined rational thought with traditional values of cooperation not competition, tolerance not conversion, sacrifice not aggression, represents the real and authentic, homegrown solution to violence.

The question still arises as to how to select traditions that sustain the humanist ethic and abandon those that reinforce prejudice? Certain traditions sustain the said ethics of harmony and peace; other popular traditions do the opposite. Traditions do not live in a vacuum; they require an integrated set of social institutions to sustain them. These institutions can be extremely unequal and hierarchical (i.e., caste) as they are in India. So what do we do? Do we sacrifice social justice to secure communal harmony? It is not clear whether religious and ethnic violence in India is a product of modernization, competition and social alienation or a result of perverted modernization. There is no going back however. Modernization is here to stay even if it only liberates individuals to participate in violence, free of traditional and customary restraints.

We only partially understand then the links between state capacity and pattern of violence. Does a weak state produce violence? Does a strong state help prevent it or will the use of coercion in fact aggravate the inter-community tensions? It is important to define what we mean by state capacity. Measuring it with the coercive strength alone is patently wrong. State capacity ought to be measured in how efficiently a state is able to resolve conflicts before they go beyond electoral politics. Institutional capacity to solve tensions at the point where they originate will prevent escalation. Existence of state capacity, however we define it, is still no guarantee of inter-community peace.

There is then no single strategy or focus of action that will prevent Hindu-Muslim violence in India. Even the coalition strategy proposed here cannot guarantee peace. It is limited by the alignment of political and ideological forces at a given time. It can, however, prove to be an important learning process even when it fails – an opportunity for mutual recognition among civic associations and state authorities that they have a common interest in preventing religious violence. The coalition strategy will provide the framework within which such a learning process can take place. In building coalitions, agencies and actors will learn a great deal about each other, styles of leadership and strengths and weaknesses, the operational dynamics of what needs to be done and who needs to be contacted to prevent violence. These coalitions need nurturing and constant repair to make the pieces fit and work well.

Notes

- 1 “Muzaffarnagar: Tales of death and despair in India’s riot-hit town,” *BBC News*, September 25, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-24172537> (accessed January 20, 2018).
- 2 While the state of UP has the doubtful honor of being one of the most communally violent states in India, the specific region around Muzaffarnagar has usually remained calm and free from such violence, largely due to economic prosperity and common interest as Hindu or Muslim farmers. This unity was forged under the auspices of Bharatiya, Kisan Sabha led by Chaudhari Charan Singh, a Jat leader who was briefly the prime minister of India in 1979–1980.
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- 7 Southasia Monitor, “India: In five months of 2017, 20% of communal violence reported in UP,” *Southasia Monitor*, August 13, 2017. <https://southasianmonitor.com/2017/08/13/india-five-months-2017-20-communal-violence-reported/> (accessed January 20, 2018). The government’s own statistics indicate that while a total of 644 incidents occurred in 2014, 751 cases were reported in 2015 and 703 incidents at the end of 2016. The state of Karnataka closely followed the UP in the number of such incidents. Since 2014, Assam, Jharkhand and West Bengal also reported a spike in communal violence. West Bengal saw a doubling of communal episodes while violence in Assam rose from one incident in 2014 to 12 in 2016. Jharkhand reported 24 incidents at the end of 2016, up from 10 incidents in 2014. See Ritu Arora, “Rising Incidence of Communal Violence in Modern India – A Matter for Concern,” *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management* (IJSRM) 5 (10) (March 2017): 6298. <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijrm/v5i7.63> (accessed February 10, 2018).
- 8 All religion-based violence in India is referred to as communal violence although arguably caste and ethnic violence is also communal, that is involving communities with a sense of distinct identity. Henceforth I refer to Hindu-Muslim violence as communal violence.
- 9 Peter Gottschalk and Wendy Doniger, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim, Multiple Identity in Narrative from Rural India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); N.S. Saksena, *Communal Riots in India* (Delhi: Trishul, 1990); Paul Brass, *Riots and Pogroms* (NY: New York University Press, 1996); Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave, Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Ram Punyani, *Communal Politics: Facts Versus Myths* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003).
- 10 The Bhagalpur riots spread to about 250 villages around Bhagalpur city in Bihar and led to 900 deaths. See Asghar Ali Engineer, “Bhagalpur Riot Inquiry Commission Report,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30, no. 28 (July 15, 1995): 1729–1731; Siddharth Varadarajan, *Gujarat, The Making of a Tragedy* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002).
- 11 The RSS is the preeminent paramilitary Hindu nationalist organization that was founded in 1925 By Keshav Baliram Hedgewar.
- 12 At the Godhra train station in Gujarat, the Muslim Ghanchi community that resides close to the station allegedly burned alive 58 Karsevaks returning from the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. There is no final finding as to who set the train on fire; some claim it was an accident, others claim it was a deliberate act of revenge. See also

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 - 14 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic conflict and civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 119–171.
 - 15 Sreenivasan Jain, "The Mystery of Kawwal: Were Muzaffarnagar riots based on distortion of facts?" *NDTV*, September 14, 2013. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/the-mystery-of-kawwal-were-muzaffarnagar-riots-based-on-distortion-of-facts-534608> (accessed February 6, 2018).
 - 16 Surabhi Khyati, "Communal Riots of Muzaffarnagar- Shamli, 2013: Institutionalised Riots System, Majoritarian Politics and Human Insecurity of the 'Minority' Community in the Region," Presented at International Studies Association, Conference 2016: 10. <http://web.isa.net.org/Web/Conferences/AP%20Hong%20Kong%202016/Archive/0702cce5-1606-453a-9787-5a6ad66ebb9e.pdf> (accessed February 17, 2018).
 - 17 National Commission For Minority (NCM) Report, 19 September 2013. http://ncm.nic.in/Tour-Reports_Muzaffarnagar.html (accessed February 6, 2018).
 - 18 NDTV news report on YouTube, "Muzaffarnagar clashes: BJP MLA booked for fake video with inflammatory comments, evading arrest." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lk2inozqGYI> (accessed February 13, 2018).
 - 19 The Bharatiya Kisan Dal was in fact a party led by Choudhari Charan Singh who brought together in the 1970s a powerful coalition of caste communities (Ahirs, Jats, Muslims Gujars and Rajputs known as MAJGAR) cutting across communal lines. But after his death, the BKD broke up and Hindu Jats joined the BJP in large numbers. The Muslim Jats stayed with Samajwadi party, which claimed to be secular. The Takait family assumed the leadership of the BKD and joined the BJP just prior to the 2014 elections.
 - 20 See Mujib Rehman, "The Consequences of Playing with Fire in Uttar Pradesh," *The Hindu Center for Politics and Public Policy*, October 7, 2016, http://www.thehinducentre.com/multimedia/archive/03041/131_The_Consequen_3041582a.pdf (accessed January 27, 2018); also see Mohan, Rao. et al., *Economic and Political Weekly*, Fact-Finding Report: Independent Inquiry into Muzaffarnagar riots, <http://www.epw.in/journal/2014/2/reports-states-web-exclusives/fact-finding-report-independent-inquiry-muzaffarnagar>, 49 (2) January 11, 2014 (accessed January 27, 2018).
 - 21 The number of deaths vary depending on the time of the body count.
 - 22 "107 killed in riots this year; 66 Muslims, 41 Hindus," *The Hindustan Times*, September 24, 2013. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/107-killed-in-riots-this-year-66-muslims-41-hindus/story-uqHMNT093ZqMa0WAsWdIpJ.html> (accessed January 20, 2018).
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 - 24 Both propositions are a gross simplification of history. The Mughals for the most part left the Hindus alone, while after initial support for the missionaries, the British were highly leery of meddling in the private lives of the country they ruled. But the Hindu nationalists have been selective in highlighting history and distorting it with falsehood to build an anti-Muslim, anti-Christian narrative. It is noteworthy that both these religions are considered to be foreign religions imposed on a defeated India. The nationalist's purpose is to reclaim what belongs to the Hindu fold.

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- 26 Human Rights Watch, April 27, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/27/india-cow-protection-spurs-vigilante-violence> (accessed February 15, 2018).
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- 30 Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, *Guidelines on Communal Harmony*, 2008. <http://mha1.nic.in/pdfs/ComHor141008.pdf> (accessed February 7, 2018).
- 31 Jyoti Punwani writes, that the 'Inflammatory speeches made at the September 7 Jat Mahapanchayat led the attacks on Muslims in Muzaffarnagar. A week earlier, on August 30, similar venom had been spewed by Muslim leaders from all parties at a meeting held after Friday prayers'. See "Hindutva's Chronic Hate speech," *The Hoot*, September 20, 2013. <http://www.thehoot.org/media-watch/opinion/hindutva-s-chronic-hate-speech-7049> (accessed February 15, 2018).
- 32 Harsh Mander et al., "Fact Finding Report: Independent Inquiry into Muzaffarnagar riots." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49, no. 2, (January 11, 2014). <http://www.epw.in/journal/2014/2/reports-states-web-exclusives/fact-finding-report-independent-inquiry-muzaffarnagar> (accessed January 29, 2018).
- 33 Mohan Rao, Ish Mishra, Pragma Singh and Vikas Bajpayi, 'Report: An Independent Inquiry into Muzaffarnagar Riots', January 1, 2014, *India Resists*. <http://www.indiaresists.com/report-an-independent-inquiry-into-muzaffarnagar-riots/> (accessed February 15, 2018).
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Singh, *Communal Violence in Muzaffarnagar*, 99.
- 37 "Hindutva Unmasked: Yogi Adityanath, BJP's most strident face, will be its chief minister in UP," *Scroll.in* (accessed January, 30, 2018).
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- 44 Asian Social Issues Program, “Roots of Sectarian Conflict,” Lecture by Atul Kohli, March 7, 2002, <http://www.asiasource.org/asip/kohli.cfm> (accessed February 15, 2018); Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India’s Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 217.
- 45 Donald Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 473.
- 46 Singh, op. cit., 96–97.
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- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid.
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7

THE POLITICS OF MUZAFFARNAGAR VIOLENCE IN 2013, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

Mujibur Rehman

Religion inspired violence in South Asia, particularly in India, is often considered outside the broad category of political violence and is described as 'riots.' There are also instances where violence between Hindus and Muslims has been analyzed as a distinct category; in a similar vein, ethnic violence is discussed and debated as if they are apolitical or non-political phenomenon. But in a competitive democratic polity, neither religion inspired, nor ethnicity driven violence are bereft of political calculation of the political elites. Often these incidences of violence are engineered and perpetrated with electoral considerations in mind; violence in Gujarat in 2002 and, Mumbai in 1992, and anti-Sikh riots in 1984 are cases in point. The overall political landscape and environment play a significant role in shaping the nature of the violence and the responses of political elites to the incidences of violence. This is not to ignore the role of religion and/or ethnicity as a factor of engendering distrust among communities, the use of symbols in the rhetoric of the perpetrators of such violence and as a powerful mobilization tool, but it is my contention that 'riots' seemingly of a religious nature should be examined within the broader political contexts. Through an exploration of the violence that took place between August and September 2013 in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, I intend to demonstrate how elite politics shaped the contour of this violence. The violence, I will further argue, is a reflection of a new form of politics in India that can be traced to the rise of right-wing Hindutva ideology and the growing support of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The new politics show that ostensibly a 'secular' party, particularly when in power, behaves no differently than the religio-political parties like the BJP.

Origins of the Muzaffarnagar riot 2013

Muzaffarnagar is a district located in the western part of India's largest State, Uttar Pradesh (UP). Despite being divided into two states in 2000, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, the politics of Uttar Pradesh continues to have the same implications for

national polity as it was prior to its division. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision first to be a candidate from Varanasi in the 2014 parliamentary election and retain it as his primary electoral constituency as opposed to Vadodra, Gujarat where he was also a successful candidate for the parliamentary seat is indicative of how India's political elites continue to recognize the importance of Uttar Pradesh in national politics. Several Indian prime ministers such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Charan Singh, V.P. Singh, Atal Vihari Vajpayee, and incumbent Narendra Modi were elected from Uttar Pradesh. The state sends 80 members to the 543-member Lok Sabha, the largest number among the states of the country. The significance of it in Indian politics cannot be overstated. In terms of demographic composition, Uttar Pradesh is home to major religious communities: Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs etc. According to Census 2011, the population is 79.73% Hindu, 19.26% Muslim, 0.18% Christian, 0.32% Sikh, 0.01% Buddhist and 0.01% other religions.¹

Unfortunately, Uttar Pradesh has a long history of violence involving Hindus and Muslims that even predates the independence of India in 1947. Some of the most influential scholarships on ethnic and religious violence, for instance, by Paul Brass,² Ashutosh Varshney³ and Gyanendra Pandey⁴ are based on cases in Uttar Pradesh. While these studies, along with others, have brought rich insights to our understanding of the nature and scope of violence in India, none has been able to motivate the state or other agencies to prevent the riots from recurring. Violence of a communal nature keeps erupting in various cities with varying scales at different times. The Muzaffarnagar violence in 2013 is an addition to the long list of such violence.⁵ In some ways, it is a result of new forms of politics unfolding in India with the rise of right-wing Hindutva politics.

Described as the sugar bowl of India, Muzaffarnagar's economy is mainly based on agriculture and sugar cane is one of its key products. The Muzaffarnagar riots erupted against a backdrop of rising communal incidents in UP, more so after the Samajwadi Party (SP) formed the government under the leadership of Akhilesh Yadav in 2012.⁶ In 2013, Uttar Pradesh (UP) had the highest number of communal incidents in the entire country. In 2014, in a reply to a question in Parliament, the Union Home Ministry revealed that there were 247 incidents in UP in 2013 and 118 incidents in 2012. Overall incidences of violence increased about 30% at the national level in 2013.⁷ According to the report, in 2013, 133 people died and 2,229 people were injured in such violence; the casualties in 2012 were 94 deaths and 2,117 injured. Bihar and Gujarat together with Uttar Pradesh experienced significant rises in communal violence, which led the central government to issue an advisory⁸ to the States.

The 2013 Muzaffarnagar violence can be traced to an 'eve-teasing' incident. In Kawal/kaval village, a Jat girl (of Hindu religion) was reportedly 'eve teased' and harassed by Shahnawaz, a Muslim boy. When her brother Sachin, and his friend Gaurav, confronted Shahnawaz, it led to a fight. All three of them—Shahnawaz, Sachin and Gaurav—were killed. This situation immediately presented opportunities for political leaders of different parties to exploit as subsequent events reveal.

Prior to becoming full-blown community-wide violence involving two communities belonging to two religions, a few political steps were taken by local leaders that need to be noted. The local Hindu and Muslim community leaders apparently saw an opportunity to consolidate their social base in light of this incident. Instead of addressing it in a manner in which the issue could be sorted out within the confines of India's criminal law, the local political leadership chose to portray and politicize it as a Hindu-Muslim conflict. Two major meetings, by Muslim and Hindu leaders, were held. On August 30, 2013 after the *Jumma* (Friday prayer), the first meeting of Muslim leaders took place. According to a report in the *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 'Thousands gathered at Meenakshi Chowk immediately after *Jumma* and BSP MP Qadir Rana, MLA Jameel Ahmad, former MP Saeedujjaman, his son Salman Saeed and BSP leader Noor Saleem Rana reportedly gave provocative speeches.'⁹ On September 7, 2013, another gathering by the Hindu community in violation of section 144 of the CrPC was held.¹⁰ Many people who attended came from western UP, Haryana and Delhi armed with swords, axes, and lathes. Provoked by the speeches given by their leaders, these people who had come to the meeting attacked Muslim villages on their return, triggering a riot for the first time in many years. The extent of the mass violence that followed indicated that they were not spontaneous but were instead pre-planned and well organized. The pre-planning was later tacitly acknowledged by the local BJP leadership. In February 2016, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) executive committee member, Umesh Mallick,¹¹ in the presence of central minister and local member of parliament (MP), Sanjeev Balyan, accused in the 2013 violence, attributed the BJP's victory in Uttar Pradesh in the 2014 parliamentary election to the Muzaffarnagar riots. According to Mallick, 'the embers [of the riots] led to the victory of Modi in Uttar Pradesh.'¹² He further revealed it was all planned in the jail where Balyan was detained as a preventive step just after the tension began to grow. The 2014 electoral outcome clearly suggests that the results of this polarization profited the BJP.¹³ Gareth Nellis, Micheal Weaver, and Steven Rosenzweig, drawing on previous instances of violence have argued that riots profited the BJP in electoral terms.¹⁴ In short, polarization creates rewarding electoral conditions for the BJP in India. In the 2017 Assembly election, the BJP won 312 of 384 seats it contested in the 403-member Assembly in Uttar Pradesh. A controversial figure Yogi Adityanath has been appointed as the chief minister, which has surprised even many BJP sympathizers.¹⁵

Hindu-Muslim polarization first took a dangerous turn during the Ayodhya movement in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Owing to the decline of the BJP's electoral fortunes in state politics, some changes and amity between the communities through the BJP's organization, which could contribute to polarization, remained intact. The BJP's decline was caused by several factors. One prominent reason was mandalization of politics in Uttar Pradesh and rise of caste-based parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) set up by Kanshi Ram,¹⁶ and the Samajwadi Party (SP) set up by Mulayam Yadav. Some scholars, for example Rajni Kothari, have argued that this division around caste lines in Indian politics contributed to secularization of the polity.¹⁷ This development encouraged many to believe that the Hindutva juggernaut had been stopped in Uttar Pradesh and also in India forever, but the results of the 2014 election and the Modi wave proved it wrong.

Prior to the Ayodhya movement during the 1980s, the politics in the region was dominated by Chaudhury Charan Singh, who has served as the Chief Minister for two terms and also served briefly as the Prime Minister of India in 1979 after the fall of Moraraji Desai government.¹⁸ Chaudhury Charan Singh had stitched together a coalition called MAJGAR, consisting of Muslims, Ahir, Yadav, Jats, Gujjars, and Rajputs. The post Charan Singh period in Uttar Pradesh politics saw the beginnings of new political formations. The Samajwadi party (SP) core voter base was formed by Yadavs; while Gujjars and Rajputs moved towards the BJP, some of them moved towards the Samajwadi Party (SP). The remnant of Charan Singh's party, led by his son, Ajit Singh, enjoyed the loyalty of Muslims and Jats, but Muzaffarnagar violence has disturbed it in a massive way.

With the ambition to build Hindu Rashtra, the BJP needed to win Uttar Pradesh back after its severe decline in the post-Mandal politics in the 1990s. Keen to attract the Jat votes, the BJP adopted a strategy to polarize the situation between Muslims and Jats/Hindus. In the course of time, the Jat-Muslim issue was politicized to fit into a larger Hindu-Muslim conflict. This trend was noticed by various political parties, who were opposed to the BJP's politics of polarization. According to Sitaram Yechury, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader, the Muzaffarnagar riot was the perfect background to anoint Modi as a PM hopeful.¹⁹ Manmohan Singh echoed the sentiment at the National Integration Council (NIC) meeting on March 14, 2014.²⁰

The violence in Muzaffarnagar presents interesting insights into the relationships between the supposedly secular parties and Indian Muslims. At the time of violence in 2013, Uttar Pradesh was not ruled by the BJP, although since the 1980s the party was a major player in the state. It emerged as the ruling party led by Narendra Modi at the Centre after 2014 and in Uttar Pradesh after the 2017 election. The Samajwadi party (SP) enjoyed state-wide support from Muslim voters. It is safe to argue that the State had enough resources to contain the riots and punish the culprits. Scholars who have studied ethnic violence have always argued that ethnic violence erupted only when there is negligence on the part of the state.²¹ That the UP State government did not intervene in the violence supports the argument. Violence was allowed to last for days, which provides insights into the State government as well as Samajwadi Party's secular credentials. The Akilesh Yadav led government (2012–2017) had ignored various reports submitted by the intelligence agencies prior to the violence suggesting that the situation in the region could explode.²² The 2013 Muzaffarnagar violence serves as a glaring example of Amrita Basu's conclusion, that Hindu nationalist anti-minority violence is likely to be most extensive when an ideologically-driven, well organized Hindu nationalist political party like the BJP, with ties to aggressive organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) assumes office in a State and is further supported by a national government run by the same party.²³ But the Muzaffarnagar violence also demonstrates that it can happen even if the state is governed by a supposedly secular party. These experiences have implications for the secular polity in India.

Relief camps and Uttar Pradesh government

As violence gripped the region, Muslims fled with their families from their villages that had been targeted. The Samajwadi Party (SP) government declared a Rs. five lakh (roughly 8000 dollars) compensation each for nearly 1,600 families. Relief camps were set up as part of the temporary accommodation for these victims in the hope they would return to their villages once normalcy returned. That is not what turned out to be the case in the end with these relief camps. They became the center of controversy, not just for mismanagement and negligence, but also for the deaths of inhabitants including children due to lack of basic facilities and extreme winter weather. The Supreme Court took notice of these developments.²⁴ At the end, the camps were forcibly shut down because they were seen as a source of embarrassment and unwarranted controversy by the Akhilesh government. Such was the approach of the Akhilesh government towards Muslim minorities and the issue of secularism. Clearly, this riot convinced many that the so called secular parties are no different from Hindutva parties like the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

Based on a report produced by the state government, R P N Singh, then Minister of State for Home Affairs of the Manmohan Singh government reported in Lok Sabha in February 2014 that 33 children under the age of 15 had died in relief camps.²⁵ According to another report published in the *Times of India* on January 16, 2015, 25 people were reported to have died owing to the freezing winter in Muzaffarnagar. At the time, the relief camps held a little over 3,500 riot victims.²⁶ The *Times of India* reporter visited the camps in Shamli, which had another 700 refugees, for two days and reported that the relatives of the dead could not even find a decent burial place for the departed. This report published after the 2014 election, had this to say:

In January of 2014, Mohd Irfan would sit outside his tent in the relief camp at Loi village and count the number of politicians visiting those who had been turned homeless after communal riots broke out in Muzaffarnagar sometime in August 2013. In the violence that followed, more than 50,000 fled their villages and 62 were killed. “General elections were around the corner and the riots were on everybody’s mind,” Irfan, 35, said. “It was a big issue for all political parties. Now no one cares about us. Madam, thanda toh abhibhi utni hi hai, bas ab neta log nahiaate.” (It’s as cold now as it was last year, just that no politicians are coming here anymore).

Once the Supreme Court sought to know more the details of the camp, particularly after the report of deaths appeared in the media, a report was prepared by the District Magistrate. According to a press report published on December 13, 2013 ‘the Supreme Court took serious note of the deaths of over 40 children in relief camps for riot-affected people in Muzaffarnagar, and asked the Uttar Pradesh government to take immediate measures to meet the threat of winter.’²⁷ These developments created an uproar in Parliament. According to this report, the Supreme Court had ordered the

Uttar Pradesh government to remedy the life-threatening conditions for children in relief camps and asked the state administration to confirm the reports of deaths brought to light in a media-based petition. A bench of Chief Justice P. Sathasivam and Justices Ranjana Prakash Desai and Ranjan Gogoi noted in the following words, 'We read in the newspapers about the death of children in the relief camps. Even Parliament also discussed the death of children. It is a matter of serious concern.'²⁸

Many civil society organizations criticized the state government for its failure to provide proper rehabilitation for those living in relief camps, which led to deaths. Despite the scathing criticisms of the state government by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Supreme Court, there seemed to be no urgency on the part of the Akhilesh government to address the plight of the victims. Instead, the ruling party functionaries such as 17 high profile members of the State Assembly decided to take an 18-day foreign trip for no apparent pressing government business.²⁹ Their itinerary included countries such as Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Italy, the Netherlands, Britain, and UAE. As the news of gross insensitiveness became public, this team led by Azam Khan, returned to India suspending their visit to Egypt only three days prior to its completion. Azam Khan apparently has been the Muslim face of the Samajwadi party. He also criticized the media for using the victims of Muzaffarnagar riots into 'an instrument of raising their TRPs [Television Rating Points].' The team included one of the notorious dons turned politician, also a controversial minister Raghuraj Pratap Singh, also known as *Raja Bhaiya*. The detailed schedule appeared more of a leisure sightseeing trip, though it was supposed to study the parliamentary traditions of the visiting countries.

The foregoing discussions show that the state government was far less sensitive and displayed very little concern in addressing the plights of victims and their future. Whatever little was done was owed to the constant pressure exerted by the Court, media, and also various civil society organizations.

Civil society and Muzaffarnagar violence

In recent years, the civil society organizations/non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have tended to play a pro-active role during political violence or ethnic violence in India. They not only contribute to the peace building but also often play crucial roles in exposing the state's abject failure and negligence, drawing attention of the judiciary and facilitating legal remedies. There are many instances of ethnic violence in which we have witnessed such roles of the civil society organizations, and their participation has brought a qualitative difference to the post-violence situations. There are many encouraging stories about the role of civil society organizations pertaining to Kandhamal 2008, Gujarat 2002, and the anti-Sikh pogrom 1984, which have impacted and continue to impact states' conduct. Muzaffarnagar was no exception; several initiatives of the members of the civil society had provided information about the nature of the violence, the predicament of the displaced, and the situation in the relief camps.

A fact-finding team led by Professor Mohan Rao, of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi visited the city and affected areas and relief camps on November 9 and 10, 2013. On inspection of 11 relief camps set up by the government, they prepared a report in which they clearly stated that the conditions of camps were below satisfactory.³⁰ According to this report, the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) placed the death toll at 52, of which 37 were Muslims and 15 Hindus. The UP government said 50,955 people were displaced, though non-official sources estimated the figure to be more than 100,000. At the time of the preparation of the report, 540 First Information Reports were registered as against 6,000 cases.

A comprehensive report, however, was prepared by the People's Union of Democratic Rights (PUDR), New Delhi. A five-member team of the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) visited the relief camps between December 28 and 30, 2013. They wrote a report on victims in relief camps based on their interactions with people of 13 camps. These victims came from 60 villages. The team visited a total of eight camps in the districts of Shamli and Muzaffarnagar. In Shamli, the team visited the camps at Malakpur, Barnavi, Kandhla, and Madarsa camp in Shamli town and at Loyi, Shahpur, Jogiya-kheda, and Jaula in Muzaffarnagar. They further met people from five other camps and discussed with officials and journalists to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the developments. Their meetings included DM Shamli, ADM Muzaffarnagar, SHO of P.S. Phugana, Village Pradhans of Loyi and Jogiya-kheda, health workers, teachers, journalists, members of religious communities, relief camp committee members, and relief workers of various non-governmental organizations. Some of the main findings of the PUDR report could be summarized as follows:

First, the Supreme Court's intervention and the media reporting of the plight of the victims and conditions in the camps forced the administration to shut down the camps. The state government pursued many coercive means to achieve this end, such as filing cases of trespassing of government property against the victims living in camps; pressure was put on the members of relief committee; pressure was put on people to leave the premises; attempts were made to dismantle the settlements of victims, etc.

Secondly, none of the relief camps were set up or managed by the government. Relief camps were set up in Muslim majority villages in the nearby areas. In every camp visited, the team found out that the State administration was indifferent and apathetic to the needs of victims and relief camps. When civil society organizations drew attention to deaths in the relief camps by petitioning to the court, the government resumed supply of medicine and other basic necessities for the camps. No facilities for school going children were present although there were school going age children in the camps. For female students, things were worse, and local schools did not enrol these students. Medical facilities were below par and was worse for pregnant women.

The third anniversary of the Muzaffarnagar violence saw the release of a report titled *Living Apart*.³¹ It explained in detail the conditions of the riot victims of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli. The report is written by civil society activists Harsh Mander, Akram Akhtar Chaudhury, Zafar Eqbal, and Rajanjya Bose. There are 65 colonies of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in Muzaffarnagar and 37 in Shamli, housing a total of 29,328 persons, the reported stated.³² The absence of the state from the lives of these IDPs remains a matter of grave concern. These colonies were established mainly from Muslim organizations or, in some cases, from social and political organizations. The story of the work of an alliance called the Sadbhawana Trust that assisted the rehabilitation of 230 households, also called Apna Ghar Colony, is a remarkable story of civil society interventions in the post-violence period.

There were several civil society organizations that were active in the region and continue to remain active even now. It will only be fair to suggest that these organizations have been far more credible actors in addressing the challenges of victims than the government.

Uttar Pradesh government and its response

The foregoing discussion showed that Akhilesh Yadav's government faced harsh observations from the Supreme Court on the issues relating to the relief camps and rehabilitation of the victims. Worse, it bulldozed and closed camps down, forcing the victims to fend for themselves. These actions came from a government led by an ostensibly secular political party.

Former Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav prior to the 2013 violence claimed to have pursued a supposedly pro-Muslim policy. While delivering a speech at an event run by a magazine called *Aina-2013-2014*, Yadav said his government had given 'uninterrupted power' supply to weavers in Muslim-dominated areas such as Mau, Azamgarh, and Ambedkarnagar.³³ As expected, the government had set up a judicial commission to examine the factors leading to the violence, which was headed by a retired judge of the Allahabad High Court, Justice Vishnu Sahai. The 700-page report with a 14-page Action Taken Report (ATR) was submitted by the judicial commission to the Akhilesh Prasad government. On March 6, 2016, the government presented the report to the UP Assembly. According to the report, the following are key factors that led to violence:

- a) failure to arrest 14 Muslim youths involved in the killing of Sachin, brother of the girl who was the target of 'eve-teasing,' and Sachin's friend Gaurav; b) poor local intelligence; c) transfer of the Muzaffarnagar District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police (SP) which created an administrative vacuum allowing violence to spread without control.

The report recorded that 62 lives were lost, and 60,000 people were displaced in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli. It also recommended a departmental enquiry against Prabol Pratap Singh for failing to anticipate the potential numbers that would turn

up at the September 7 *mahapanchayat* held at Nagla-Mandaur twenty kilometres away from Muzaffarnagar. Mr Singh, an intelligence officer working with the local police station, estimated a 15,000–20,000 strong crowd, but the turnout was around 50,000–60,000, more than three times Singh's assessment.

Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav himself held the Home ministry whose responsibility was to maintain law and order. Yet, there was no reference in the report of the Akhilesh Yadav government's failure. Conspicuously absent was any criticism or indictment for the violence or state response. Blaming a police officer for a mistaken assessment of a crowd in a gathering as a primary cause of massive and unprecedented violence is quite confounding. This only adds to the skepticism about a government appointed inquiry commission in India and gives credence to the allegations that the commissions tends to act like a pawn at the hand of the government. Although in most cases, inquiry commissions in India take a great deal of time, often years, to submit the report, Justice Vishnu Sahai's commission was an exception as it took only three years. However, both its intent and timing raised questions. Some alleged that the report was published quickly to provide a clean sheet to the Akhilesh Yadav government, especially as the results of 2014 election had indicated that the BJP might return to power in the forthcoming election. The publication of the report in 2016, ahead of the 2017 election, raised questions too.

On September 24, 2013, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was established. In all, 567 riot-related cases were lodged and First Information Reports (FIRs) filed. In the end, in most cases, witnesses turned hostile, and there was virtually no progress on the legal side of the cases. According to a victim, 'Despite lodging complaints several times at Fugana and Buhara police stations, no one came to help us. People on behalf of the accused approached us, even threatened us with dire consequences. We are a poor family. There is no one to take care of the family if anything happens to me. We did what we thought was correct.'³⁴

For observers with a secular bent, the conduct of the government led by Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, son of Mulayam Yadav, once known as Maulana Mulayam, has been deeply disappointing. While some scholars insist that the family dispute was a key factor for the SPs declining fortunes, I argue that Muzaffarnagar played a dominant role. According to Sudha Pai:

Their (Muslims) support enabled the SP to win elections, particularly to obtain a majority in 2012. However, there is much anguish within the Muslim community following the Muzaffarnagar riots that the SP failed to prevent or help rehabilitate the riot-affected. Statements of the old guard regarding the amount and nature of compensation and of the relief camps were particularly controversial.³⁵

When violence took place, the Centre was governed by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) that had presented itself as a pro-minority coalition. In 2014, Narendra Modi led BJP assumed power. Modi has remained largely silent on Muzaffarnagar violence and never made a trip to the violence affected areas. Many consider the massive victory of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2017 Assembly

election was essentially a vote for Modi. Both the campaigns in 2014 and in 2017 presented Modi the opportunity to take a stand on the victims of Muzaffarnagar, but he chose to ignore it. He alluded to the Muzaffarnagar riots only to attack Rahul Gandhi who had said that Pakistan's intelligence agency (ISI) was working to brainwash young Muslim victims and recruit them for terror activities.³⁶ He accused Rahul Gandhi of tarnishing the image of the Muslim community, and later attacked Mulayam Singh Yadav for failing to help the victims.³⁷ Ironically, Sanjeev Balyan, one of the accused in the Muzaffarnagar violence was appointed by Modi to his cabinet. On the other hand, the Yogi Adityanath government was making efforts to withdraw cases against the BJP leaders who are accused as perpetrators of violence against Muslims.³⁸

Conclusion

The political context in which the Muzaffarnagar violence is discussed has changed considerably with the growing electoral strength of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) not just at the centre but in most states in India today. As of February 2018, the party rules in 19 states, an unprecedented political development in modern Indian history. The BJP's victory in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh in 2017 has encouraged many pundits to argue that its prospects of returning to power after the 2019 parliamentary election is very high. While electoral politics has its own uncertainty, what is crucial to recognize is that India is going through an ideological shift.³⁹ Seen in this context, what are the implications of the Muzaffarnagar violence? What could be the possible consequences of Muzaffarnagar violence on the relationship between the state and violence? Richard Bessel (2015) has argued that the exploration of the history of violence therefore should not be limited to describing various manifestations of what some assume to be an unchanging feature of the human character and condition. Attempts to measure violence are as frequent as they are problematic. Violence is not constant, nor are the perceptions of violence.⁴⁰ Likewise, the perceptions of violence with regard to the Hindu-Muslim riot has changed and is changing based on many factors including the context. Hence, it is imperative to recognize that the Muzaffarnagar violence was not a conventional Hindu-Muslim riot but a reflection of the changing ideological and political landscape in India due the rise of the right-wing Hindutva ideology and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).⁴¹ It is this context that makes the Muzaffarnagar violence a uniquely significant case for study, as it will have wider implications with regard to minority rights.

The history of violence in India, it is crucial to reiterate, did not begin with the modern Indian state that was established in 1947. Historian Upinder Singh has shown political violence was very much an integral part of political life in ancient India.⁴² The idea that India has a non-violent past is indeed a modern construct in the formulations of Gandhi and Nehru. Considering that there is a continuity, the violence that we witness has deeper roots than what is generally understood as local factors. That inter-community relations could explode in the form of violence often without any particularly compelling reasons can be learned from Muzaffarnagar violence. But in the manner the governing elites of the state have treated victims, including their indifference and arrogance, informs

us that the mere existence of a state or rules of law cannot ensure peace or positive inter-community relations. To achieve that objective, there is a need to have a proactive political elite with a commitment to the values and goals of peace and citizenship rights. Given that violence occurred, and negligence took place under a supposedly secular regime, it further tells us that a mere claim of such ideology is not enough to guarantee safety for religious minorities.⁴³ What has created further conditions for violence is the legitimacy that such situations create and often inspire. As the perpetrators of the violence continue to enjoy freedom and impunity owing to the nexus between political elites and other interest groups, it provides legitimacy to the violent acts and creates conditions for further violence in the future. We also learn that civil society organizations together with the media and judiciary could contribute positively in championing minority rights and human rights and preventing further spread of violence. Finally, political violence is not an isolated experience. Like other forms of violence, it could be multi-causal and its containment demands multiple approaches. Similar lessons could be learnt from a comparative study of ethnic violence as well.⁴⁴

Notes

- 1 See "Uttar Pradesh Religious Census 2011" in <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/uttar+pradesh.html> (accessed February 2, 2018).
- 2 Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu – Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 3 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
- 4 Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 5 In January 2018, a major episode of violence erupted in Kasganj district in Uttar Pradesh, mainly on the issue of flag hosting on the Republic Day (January 26, 2018).
- 6 Samajwadi Party (SP) was founded by Mulayam Yadav in 1990. After it won the election in 2012, Akhilesh Yadav, his son, took over as the Chief Minister for the first time.
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8

STATE VIOLENCE AND YOUTH RESISTANCE

Perspectives from Indian-held Kashmir

Hafsa Kanjwal

Introduction

On July 8, 2016, Burhan Muzaffar Wani, the 22-year-old Hizbul Mujahideen commander in Indian-held Kashmir was killed, along with two of his associates, in an encounter with Indian forces in the village of Bumdoora in South Kashmir.¹

The young rebel had been absconding Indian forces for nearly seven years, when he joined the militancy at the age of fifteen. The son of a principal of a higher secondary school and a Qu'ran teacher who completed his post graduation in the sciences, Wani was born in Tral, a town in South Kashmir that has served as a major site of resistance to Indian rule. Wani left his comfortable middle-class life and joined the militancy in October 2010, in the immediate aftermath of a summer of protests and killings of Kashmiri youth. His family members and close friends reported that Wani was deeply troubled by an incident during which he, and his brother, Khalid, and another friend, were beaten up by Indian forces while they were riding their motorcycle in their hometown. The forces frisked the boys and asked for cigarettes in return for permission to ride on the road. His brother complied, but was still beaten by the soldiers. As he lay unconscious, Wani and his friend managed to escape, with Wani swearing that he would seek "revenge" for the incident.²

Wani quickly rose through the ranks of the Hizbul Mujahideen, a militant group that has been operating in Kashmir since the insurgency of the late 1980s and 1990s. Although the group seeks the joining of Kashmir with Pakistan, the young Kashmiris that join it do so for a variety of reasons. While some may be pro-Pakistan, others want an end to the Indian occupation, with the desire for "azadi" or freedom leaving open the political possibilities of Kashmir's future. They join the Hizb because it is the primary militant group operating currently in Kashmir; the pro-independence group, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, gave up arms in the mid-1990s while the Pakistan-based Lashkar-i-Taiba has limited its militant activities since the 2008 attack in Mumbai.

Wani was the first militant in years to receive a considerable following in Kashmir, especially amongst the youth. There are multiple reasons for this. First, Wani was young and managed to escape being killed for years, in a political climate in which the lifespan of a militant is months, even days. Wani was also a local. Many militants operating in Kashmir have been foreign—either from Pakistan or Afghanistan—but Wani was one of the first in the new group of “home grown” militants. In addition, Wani’s personal story is one that many Kashmiris could relate to—an average middle class family that inevitably became embroiled in Kashmir’s political conflict. Finally, Wani had a considerable social media presence; he shared videos and images of him and the other militants playing cricket in the forests, posing in mountainous landscapes, and urging Kashmiri youth to join the militancy. As the anthropologist Mohamad Junaid states, these images evoked a “tender affection,” as they reclaimed “the humanity of the ‘Kashmiri militant’ and reconnected the idea of the rebel with his people at the visceral level.”³ Since 2010, he achieved a folk-like status, with tales being narrated of his narrow escapes from Indian forces and his generosity towards the people of the various villages where he would hide.

Where there is no evidence of Wani ever conducting an attack, he may have been the mastermind behind several. As his popularity increased throughout the Valley, the Indian state issued a \$15,000 (one million rupees) bounty for his capture. It was on July 8 that local informers brought Indian forces to Wani and his two associates, as they were hiding in a home in the village of Bumdoora. While reports of the actual encounter vary, all three were killed.

After news of Wani’s killing spread, there was collective mourning throughout Kashmir. Shams Irfan, a local journalist who was in Tral, Burhan’s hometown, when the body arrived, states:

By next morning, tens of thousands of mourners from towns and villages across Kashmir had gathered in Tral. They came in trucks, buses, tractor trolleys, cars; they came on motorcycles, scooters, and cycles; and they came on foot. ...The crowd of mourners was so dense and so immense that it took me an hour to walk a few kilometres. The last 500 metres, I didn’t even have to walk. The crowd carried me into the eidgah, which was packed tight, bursting beyond its capacity. The eidgah, which normally accommodates about 50,000 people at one time, was packed to the brim, and after each round of funeral prayers people kept leaving and new mourners filled it again. By the end of the day, about 200,000 people would have joined the multiple rounds.⁴

In the ensuing protests throughout Kashmir after Wani’s death, nearly 100 people were killed and more than 15,000 were injured. Over 1,000 of those injured—mostly youth—were blinded by the use of pellet guns. 8,000 people were arrested.

Wani’s death reenergized the new wave of youth resistance that had been on the rise since 2008. Online and on the streets, a generation of young Kashmiri Muslim boys and girls made their protest against Indian rule clear. His death also led the Indian state and its local intermediaries to reinforce older modes of suppressing

dissent, while devising new ones. This chapter examines how a new generation of youth activists has played a critical role in redefining the Kashmiri movement for self-determination as well as the precarious political and social conditions in which they function. It argues that we must see youth resistance in Indian-held Kashmir in the context of ongoing state violence and repression and the lack of political resolution of the “Kashmir dispute,” now surpassing its seventh decade.

Five sections follow the introduction. In the first section, I provide a brief overview of the historical roots of the youth movement, beginning with pre-Partition Kashmiri political formations up until the armed insurgency of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The second section considers the year 2008 as the start of the shifts in the modes of activism, and the year that the generation that was born during the insurgency became heir to the struggle for self-determination. The third section examines the multiple spaces where youth resist, how that resistance has shaped the understandings of the occupation and the challenges that exist for building a movement amidst the possibilities of betrayal or cooption. In the fourth section, I look at the variety of ways in which state violence and repression is meted out to the population at large, but youth in general. Finally, the last section addresses the issue of “political radicalization,” and challenges the simplistic understandings of the role of Islam in the ongoing youth movement.

Historical roots of the youth movement

While most histories trace the Kashmir conflict to 1947, I begin with the year 1931, when Kashmiris launched their first mass agitation against the Dogras, a Hindu monarchy that ruled over the Muslim-majority region from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, during the period of British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. This realignment of the timeframe for the dispute allows us to situate later developments as not simply spurred by the creation of the Indian and Pakistani nation-states, and their subsequent rivalry, but also as a result of the internal dynamics of the state. During the 1931 agitation, Kashmiris called for a more representative government and better economic and educational opportunities, especially for the region’s Muslims. Early Kashmiri nationalists began to articulate the demand for a “Naya Kashmir,” a socialist, democratic, secular state that, as a Muslim-majority would safeguard the rights of its religious minorities, both Hindus and Sikhs. Nonetheless, the region’s struggle for an end to Dogra rule became entangled with political developments across the Indian subcontinent. As a princely state, the state of Jammu and Kashmir (as it was officially termed, Jammu was the region the Dogras hailed from) had the option of acceding to either of the two dominions, Hindu-majority India or Muslim-majority Pakistan. A murky transfer of sovereignty by the then Hindu Maharaja of Kashmir led a majority of the territory to be incorporated into the Indian Union through a treaty of accession, which gave India control over foreign affairs, defense, and communications of the region in return for military protection against an invading

tribal raid.⁵ The treaty promised that the state's future would be determined "by a reference to the people."⁶ Both India and Pakistan went to war in 1948, resulting in two-thirds of the former princely state being controlled by India, while one-third was controlled by Pakistan. India took the dispute to the United Nations, which called for a plebiscite in the region once hostilities had ceased.

Local demands for a plebiscite to determine the future of Kashmir were sidelined throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Corrupt and unrepresentative pro-Indian governments were installed in the state, whose role was primarily to secure the accession for India and quell pro-Pakistan or pro-independence sentiments in the region. Through these local governments, India eroded the state's political, economic, and judicial autonomy, resulting in even greater unrest. For example, a number of the elections were rigged, and the election machinery would not allow oppositional parties to contest. The state became increasingly dependent on its fiscal ties with India, which provided much of the budget to run its socio-economic programs. A number of groups emerged, including the Political Conference, Plebiscite Front, and student groups that sought the implementation of the UN resolution for plebiscite in the region. They held protests, wrote to international bodies, and visited towns, cities, and villages throughout the region to gain public support. As the demand for plebiscite increased, the Indian state managed to coopt the leadership of the primary group, the Plebiscite Front, into an agreement that rendered the plebiscite obsolete, and placed its leadership at the helm of power. Yet, the political mobilization of the masses had already spread. The failure of secular and constitutional means to resolve the issue, as well as the realignments in global politics after the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, resulted in a turn to more violent means. From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, Kashmir was embroiled in a violent uprising between Kashmiri and foreign fighters against the Indian state. The insurgency was supported by Pakistan. It was initially led by the secular, pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, but was, with the help of Pakistan, overtaken by the pro-Pakistan, Islamist Hizbul Mujahideen. The Indian state managed to quash the movement through direct force, the introduction of counter-insurgency militant groups such as the Ikhwan, and a policy of divide and rule that contributed to infighting within the militant and pro-freedom ranks. During this time, over 700,000 Indian security forces, including soldiers and para-military, became part of the permanent landscape of the region, and are so until today. The uprising also led to the forced migration of a vast majority of Kashmir's Hindu minority, the Pandits, many of who lived in camps in Jammu or other cities in India.

For most of the 2000s, it appeared that the Kashmiri movement for self-determination had been quashed, as Indian and international analysts projected a "return to normalcy" and the local populace grew disillusioned with militant groups.⁷ Nonetheless, the scale of militarization continued and a series of draconian laws, including the Public Safety Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, remained. In 2008, a new wave of largely non-violent protests began to emerge in Kashmir, calling for *azadi*, or freedom from Indian rule. They were led by the generation that was born during the period of heightened militancy.

A new generation inherits the struggle

The triggers for this new wave of protest include the Indian state's attempted land grabs, extrajudicial killings, and the torture and killing of Kashmiri youth. In 2008, 2009, and 2010, three separate instances occurred that revitalized the movement for *azadi*. The first year saw the Amarnath land transfer controversy in the summer months. The government had reached an agreement to transfer nearly 100 acres of land to the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, an organization that oversees the annual Hindu pilgrimage in Kashmir, to erect permanent facilities for the pilgrimage. For the first time since the height of the militancy, peaceful mass protests erupted in the Kashmir Valley, opposing the land transfer, saying it would pave the way to develop Israel-like settlements within the region and that the transfer was a "land grab" by the Indian state that would sever Kashmir's autonomy. The following summer, two young Kashmiri women were found raped and murdered in the town of Shopian. Locals alleged that Indian forces were the perpetrators. The forces denied the allegations, saying that the women had drowned in a stream. As the investigations became embroiled in accusations of a cover up—an independent, women-led commission later stated that "at every stage, those responsible for unmarking the culprit/s, have systematically and deliberately destroyed, tampered, diluted the evidence and thus misdirected and obfuscated the investigation"—the Valley once again erupted in protest.⁸ Finally, in the summer of 2010, which was later dubbed the "year of killing youth," locals protested the extrajudicial killing of three villagers, who were accused of being militants by the Indian army. The incident was later discovered to be a fake encounter. Over 115 people, mostly young boys, were killed in subsequent protests.

The previous two years had provided the build up to 2010, which was a pivotal year for the new youth movement. Analysts dubbed it as Kashmir's own "intifada," making reference to parallels with Palestinian resistance against Israel.⁹ It saw the rise of the use of social media; videos and images circulated of protests, state violence, and of the bodies of those who were killed. These were circulated not just locally, but also internationally, with the intent that the outside world would see what was happening in Kashmir under the aegis of the world's "largest democracy." It also saw the rise of youths who were involved in stone throwing during protests, arguing that in the face of Indian bullets, Kashmiris only had stones to defend themselves. Since 2010, the space for youth involvement, and engagement, has evolved, redefining the region's historical movement for self-determination.

Shifting modes of activism

Kashmiri youths today are empowered with new information and communication technologies that increase the movement's social and cultural reach. These technologies expand activists' networks within Kashmir and also link the movement for self-determination with a global discourse of resistance, ranging from Palestine to Ferguson.¹⁰

On one level, the youth movement has taken on elite or middle class contours, as it has been influenced by the upwardly mobile status of particular demographics within Kashmiri society. Many young Kashmiris from elite or middle class families are traveling abroad for their education—either to universities in India or the United Kingdom and the United States—where they encounter new ideas and types of activism. A large number of these Kashmiri students are studying the humanities and social sciences, and in the process becoming more aware of their history and the place of Kashmir among other decolonizing struggles. This emerging awareness has led to a blossoming of young Kashmiri artists, activists, writers, journalists, filmmakers, and academics that are producing political art, literature, music, and scholarship.

This Kashmiri youth-driven activism and cultural production has crafted a new discourse that—while relying on multiple, concurrent frames of reference and inspiration—is deeply connected to the desire for justice in Kashmir.

One such example is Kashmiri cartoonist Malik Sajad's 2015 graphic novel, *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*. Sajad, who started drawing political cartoons for Kashmiri newspapers at a young age, narrates his personal story of growing up in Srinagar's Batmaloo area during a period of heightened militancy and witnessing the harsh repression tactics of the Indian state and its security forces. Sajad deftly brings together the modern graphic art form with traditional Kashmiri embroidery and design, drawing upon contemporary cultural icons as well as Kashmir's rich historical traditions and folklore. Using the language of memoir, human rights, Islamic mysticism, and political critique, Sajad does not pay homage to any particular political party or ideology, but shows the everyday struggles and heartbreaks of life under military occupation.¹¹ It is both the universality of his themes as well as the specificity of the Kashmir context that draws in the reader. Sajad is one of many Kashmiri youth experimenting with different cultural forms—both online and off—to bring attention to the Kashmir issue.

The prevalence of multiple frames of reference in youth activism and cultural production challenge easy categorizations into “secular” or “religious” frames. The “Muslim” identity of Kashmir is refracted through a number of lenses: a struggle for freedom against an unjust rule, a source of identity, a spiritual retreat in the midst of chaos, and sometimes, a vision for justice. But it is also informed by a number of parallel influences, including leftism, knowledge of liberal theories and their limitations, feminist and Islamic feminist discourses, human rights and legal discourses, as well as critical theory. In one article entitled “The Pitfalls of Collaboration,” Kashmiri student and activist, Umar Lateef Misgar, analyzes the ability of a repressive power to sponsor a class of local collaborators. Utilizing a keen awareness of critical theory, Misgar critiques the statements of those Kashmiris who defend their participation in the state government saying that they are “changing the system from inside.” He argues:

A struggle against colonial system, throughout history, has almost always been motivated by the idea of national liberation. In other words, complete decimation of the colonial structure. Any attempts to modify the colonial structure are only cosmetic at best and deceptive at worst...In 68 years of Kashmir's military occupation, no "insider" has ever dared to either rebel or change the system once they are in it... How many genuine attempts at addressing the political demands of Kashmiris?¹²

Indeed, there are fierce discussions amongst youth circles on a variety of topics pertaining to their past, present, and future, leading to new spaces for discussion and modes of thinking on the future of Kashmir. This occurs in universities, in cafes, online, and during meetings and events. This has led to a broader vision of *azadi* and fierce debates on the nature of the Kashmir conflict. Kashmiri youths are at the forefront of defining what constitutes *azadi*, and challenging long-held perspectives on the role of religion, economy, culture, and education. Responding to various developments in society, they debate the use of violence versus other means of resistance, the role of gender in the conflict, the status of religious minorities, and the role of Islam and Muslim identity. While they connect to feelings of being marginalized as Muslims as a result of the so-called Global War on Terror, these new perspectives do not simply rely on religious identification, but also incorporate critiques of imperialism, religious nationalism, and global capitalism. For example, many youth are critical of Pakistan's role in Kashmir and are beginning to think beyond the ideals constructed by nationalist imaginaries—even those within Kashmir.

The activism of the new generation of Kashmiri youth points to another significant shift in Kashmir: a sphere of politics that exists outside of Kashmir's traditional pro-freedom parties.¹³

Since the late 1980s, the pro-freedom leadership, comprised of groups such as the Hurriyat and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), dominated Kashmiri resistance against the Indian state. Mired in their own political intrigues, infighting, and allegations of corruption, the influence of these groups and their leaders waned in recent years. While supporting these groups' ultimate aims, many in Kashmir have begun to question their modes of resistance, critiquing the overuse of *hartal*, or general strike, as well as their inability to do more than "simply keep the struggle alive."¹⁴ Some youths also feel that there is very little space for them to be involved in these parties, unlike the pro-Indian local parties that make space for youth to take on bigger roles.

Kashmiri activist Muzzammil Thakur, who is the president of the Kashmir Institute of International Affairs and runs a number of development projects in the Valley, laments the prevailing predicament of the pro-freedom groups.

There doesn't seem to be a committee of qualified people that can move the movement forward, and provide us with a strategy. How many of our leaders have a background in negotiations or political theory? Where are the new strategies? Either we have *hartal* scalled by the pro-freedom leadership, or

curfews called by the government. Many youth are beginning to question the leadership—what have you succeeded in getting us? Political sentiment alone will not drive us forward—we must have a real strategy forward.¹⁵

Yet, not all agree that this is the primary reason for the pro-freedom groups' waning influence. Furthermore, it is important to consider the role of the political and military occupation in restricting Hurriyat's "ability to exercise political agency."¹⁶ Wajahat Ahmad, who teaches sociology at OP Jindal University, thinks that most middle class activists are not interested in the harsh reality of membership.

Youth do not join Hurriyat or JKLF not because these parties are not welcoming but because of the harsh reality that associating with pro-independence groups means arrest, beatings, death of a career and in a classist and status conscious society like ours, an identity crisis. Middle class youth who are journalists, cartoonists, writers, academics, and human rights activists do not consciously engage with the pro-independence parties, as they know the cost of a formal association with these groups. Pro-freedom parties are more than happy to accept young people, but who would sit in a Hurriyat office all day and give up jobs or university degrees in return for a few thousand rupee monthly stipend and the risk of an arrest or beating or risk police harassment to one's family?¹⁷

Despite differences of opinion on the efficacy of the pro-freedom parties today, many Kashmiri youths nevertheless acknowledge the important role the parties have played since the 1980s and the difficulties they face due to the limitations placed upon them by the Indian state.

Challenges from within

While the youth movement offers critical scope for revitalizing the movement for self-determination, is it not without its own challenges and contradictions. There have been a number of civil society initiatives that have emerged since 2008—some whose political motivations are explicitly linked to various state agencies, and others whose background and funding is not so explicit. These organizations conduct a variety of activities pertaining to human rights, media, development, youth empowerment, education, and conflict resolution. Yet, these organizations, and the individuals that are affiliated with them, are seen with suspicion on the ground. Rifat Rathor, a local Kashmiri journalist, says that there are, "Multiple agencies working in Kashmir (Indian, Pakistani, local Kashmiri state and its pro-Indian parties, American/British, etc.) who want to control indigenous dissent and propagate their own narrative of Kashmir. These agencies work in different forms in Kashmir, either as NGOs or through other organizations."¹⁸ Speaking to the climate of suspicion and skepticism, Rathor suggests that the motives of these organizations have been exposed, "and now people have lost their trust." From the perspective of the various agencies, youth are an important target for their efforts. The youths have been at the forefront of the past

decade of uprisings, and have unequivocally “raised voice against the injustice,” and thus, the agencies want to “divert their attention and silence their voices.” In bringing their attention to issues of arts or entrepreneurship, Rathor suggests that these discussions create a civil society space where topics that do not situate the occupation at the core, gain traction, and are posited as the “solution” to the trials plaguing Kashmir, instead of the root issues of confronting political and military occupation. Rathor also states that there are a number of youths who are interested in getting close to the corridors of power and the benefits and perks that it may bring. While they may present a pro-*azadi* stance on the outside, they are easily coopted by the state or other agencies. Thus, there is an element of suspicion for each initiative: Who is it funded by? What are its ostensible goals? What is the political end?

The two pro-Indian parties in the region, the National Conference (NC) and the PDP (People’s Democratic Party), engage in a widespread system of patronage, which includes active youth wings that seek to coopt Kashmiri youth. Many youths, however, are aware of how a conflict economy works, and the ways in which vested interests are able to exploit internal divisions, and create distrust in society. They also feel that people take advantage of the conflict to pursue their own ends. As a result, the possibility for betrayal and cooption exists, and is of concern to those who are engaged. Indeed, “India’s historical successes in weakening Kashmiri resistance have been realized by relying more on strategies of cooption than of violence,” Wajahat Ahmad argues.¹⁹ Ahmad refers to these individuals as “conflict entrepreneurs who thrive on the suffering of Kashmiris,” to achieve power. Critiquing the attendance of Kashmiris in state-sponsored track-two diplomacy initiatives, he locates their desire for relevance and attention, and how they are driven by pure personal ambition. Because of their access to resources, they are able to bring people to their side, and thus create further divisions within the movement. Critical to this, he argues, is an understanding of the class dimensions of the Kashmir conflict—a “petite bourgeois struggle,” according to Ahmad, is “bound to become corrupted.” It is these individuals who have high social and cultural capital that are then used by the vested interests to legitimize occupation or other political ends. In turn, these “conflict entrepreneurs” are able to gain access to travel, opportunity, and power—upward mobility that is “aided by bourgeois class ideology that prizes economic achievement, status and maintenance of social order or status quo and frowns upon or criminalizes resistance, upheavals, and ideologies of revolutionary social or political change.”²⁰ Meanwhile, it is the marginalized social classes that remain on the frontlines of protest, and end up being killed. Rathor agrees: “for common people, who have spilled their blood for the freedom struggle, they are just difference faces of the occupation.”

An invasive state

Alongside these important developments, Kashmiri youth remain in the immediate line of fire, facing violent suppression from the Indian government, affiliated right-wing groups, and the local state and security apparatus in Kashmir. While state repression has existed in Kashmir for most of its troubled history, it has evolved and

transformed in response to the new youth movement. This has led many, especially in the middle class, to refrain from participating too vocally, worried about repercussions for themselves and their families.

The massive, spontaneous popular response to Wani's death precipitated the BJP-led Indian government to take on a more hardline approach to Kashmir than its Congress predecessors. The Modi government's approach to Kashmir has been primarily informed by right-wing Hindu groups affiliated with the BJP that seek to abrogate Kashmir's "special status" within the Indian constitution, allow Indians to buy land in Kashmir (which, under Article 35A of the Indian constitution, is not permitted as the local state has the authority to determine who constitutes a "permanent resident" that can buy land) and change the religious demographics of the state by developing army colonies and separate areas for Kashmiri Hindus. The Indian government's approach to Kashmir has also been increasingly informed by what is known as the "Doval Doctrine." Ajit Doval currently serves as the National Security Advisor, and is known as India's "most powerful security bureaucrat."²¹ As applied to Kashmir, the "Doval doctrine" entails the flexing of the Indian state's (military) power, without any restrictions or considerations of morality. It considers the Indian state's previous treatment of Kashmiri resistance as falling into a politics of appeasement, which has only emboldened Kashmiri "separatists." As Sushil Aaron of the *Hindustan Times* argues, "Apart from the use of force to quell protests, Doval also endorses a hardline political approach with a view to conceptually reconfigure the conflict. India must reiterate unequivocally that J&K is an integral part of India. Delhi must insist that there is no political question to be settled in Kashmir."²² Under the doctrine, there is no *political* aspect to the Kashmir problem, just Pakistan's interference in bolstering Kashmiri separatists, a region that remains an "integral" part of India (and not a disputed territory).

It is this hardline approach, that relies primarily on military might, covert operations, and brutal suppression of dissent, that has come to the fore in recent years. This is especially evident in the response to recent mass protests in Kashmir. Before 2016, most protestors were fired upon by live bullets, leading to countless deaths and injuries. As a result of (limited) protest from the international human rights community and domestic pressures, the state turned to the use of pellet guns, which, when fired, shoot small, but high-velocity lead pellets into the skin and damage internal organs. Many of these pellets were fired into young people's faces, resulting in a number of youths being blinded. It appeared to many that the message from the state had taken on a more sinister tone: We may not kill you, but will leave you in such a state that you would rather wish you were dead.²³ Nevertheless, during the 2016 agitation, even with the use of pellet guns, nearly 100 youths were killed. Indian forces argue that they are facing unruly crowds of young Kashmiri stone throwers, and thus have no other means of response. Yet, anthropologist Mohamad Junaid argues that "anytime there is an injury or death, young people respond by throwing stones at soldiers, which gives the latter an alibi to escalate violence."²⁴

In addition to brutally quashing protests, Indian forces also enter into neighborhoods, arresting and beating those who they believe are stirring the agitation. They work with a strong network of local informers, many of them who are forced to work for the occupation as a result of financial need or fear for their lives and families. They regularly arrest youths who are involved in stone throwing or participation in protests, many of whom are under the age of 18. These youths are booked under the notorious Public Security Act (PSA), which effectively brands them for the rest of their lives even if they are released. In 2011, Amnesty International called the PSA a “lawless law” and declared that it was a way for the government to circumvent the rule of law.²⁵ The subsequent negative media attention given to this law resulted in an increase of illegal detentions outside of the PSA, as police try to deal with dissent under the radar. During their detention, youths are subjected to torture, including electric shocks and sexual humiliation.²⁶

The actions of the state also extend to other arenas of resistance. Just as new technologies have played a transformative role in youth activism, new technologies are also being used by various state agencies as an advanced method of invasive surveillance. Through an active internet cell, the state hires hackers to retrieve information about youth organizing online and to create fake social media accounts to troll online forums and instigate dissent in order to see who might be a potential threat to the state.²⁷ “There is a lot of money being pumped in this area,” says Dilnaz Boga, a journalist who covers youth issues in Kashmir. “The state is able to control youth voices by figuring out information about them and then using it against them—including information about their personal and family lives.”²⁸ Boga affirms that Facebook is used for multiple purposes. “The state is able to keep an eye on the likes and comments, and hire people to egg on young people. With this strategy, the government is essentially able to find out who is willing to die or not.”²⁹ The internet cell also monitors those individuals who are the most active online, including journalists and academics. The names of these individuals are then circulated, and local and central intelligence agencies attempt to intimidate their families in order to get them to stop writing and becoming active.³⁰

In moments of heightened crisis, such as dates of commemoration or after killings of youth activists, the state clamps down on communication networks, sometimes for days or weeks at a time, including social media. As a result, youths are unable to mobilize and build momentum around particular issues. This illiberal and undemocratic muzzling of expression is meant to curtail dissent. The state also preempts calls for organized protests by declaring a curfew in the region, with strict shoot-on-site orders. A number of calls for marches to the United Nations headquarters, or protests to commemorate important historical dates, have been prevented in this way. Mohamad Junaid describes curfews in Kashmir as a “military siege,” stating that “Not only are people forced to stay inside their homes on pain of getting shot or arrested, but a blockade is imposed on essential supplies, like food, medicine and fuel.”³¹

According to local activists, there have been more insidious means of curbing youth dissent. In one such example, local observers note how drug use has increased in Kashmir, especially in areas such as Tral, Pulwama, Islamabad, and Sopore where

resistance to Indian rule is most prominent.³² The coincidence is not lost on Kashmiris; many believe that drugs are being pumped into Kashmir through black markets, much like they were in Punjab, to distract the youths from activism. Many also become addicted while they are in jail.³³

Suppression in Kashmir goes beyond targeting youths that are agitating against the Indian state. The entire Kashmiri student body politic is deemed suspect; students in Kashmir have no space to organize or mobilize politically. Student groups, unless they espouse the politics of mainstream Indian parties such as the Congress or BJP, are not allowed to meet in universities. As a result, the Kashmir University Students Union has been working underground in recent years, and its leadership is regularly harassed and surveilled. Freedom of expression is restricted. Indeed, Facebook works in tandem with the Indian state to remove or suspend any posts that it views as being controversial. Mir Suhail, another Kashmiri political cartoonist, had his cartoon marking the death anniversary of Afzal Guru removed and his account suspended for three days.³⁴ After Wani's death, a number of Kashmiri activists had their Facebook accounts suspended.

In addition to killings, arrests, torture, and restrictions on expression, youth activists say that there is also a "cultural" war that is being played by the state and its various agencies. An element of this was explained earlier in this essay, with a concerted effort by multiple agencies to influence civil society activities. There is also a parallel effort by the state apparatus to encourage youths to join administrative services, the police, or other careers where their ability to be political agents is restricted. These individuals are promoted as being the ideal for Kashmiri youth, with promises of access to state resources and economic and social status, in opposition to stone-throwers or militants, who are primarily blamed for all of the ills in society.³⁵ Cultural warfare includes all activities that seek to undermine the people's struggle for self-determination, often positing it as Islamic extremism or placing doubts in people's minds about local activists—situating them as collaborators or circulating rumors about their character. The end result of this strategy is to generate feelings of skepticism and distrust in society, so that youths will decide that it is better to benefit from the existing structures, rather than strive to create new ones.

On "radicalization"

The increasing suppression and violence of the Indian state, especially since the summer of 2010, has led to an increase in Kashmiri youths joining militant groups. Unlike their predecessors in the late 1980s and 1990s, many of these youths are educated. Like Wani, they joined the militancy after facing harassment at the hands of the security forces or witnessing the death or atrocities committed against a family member or friend. From the perspective of the broader Indian state, media, and society, these youths are seen as Islamic terrorists—religious fanatics who, with the help of Pakistan, seek to turn Kashmir into an ISIS styled haven. While it is indeed true that these organizations espouse an Islamist ideology, and that there have been a few incidents of ISIS flags raised during protests, the rendering of these

youth as “Islamic terrorists” is highly simplistic. For example, while ISIS flags have been seen in protests, experts contend this is a move to taunt Indian security forces and there is no evidence to suggest that these youths are being recruited into ISIS or even endorse their ideology.³⁶ In this section, I complicate dominant understandings of religion in the youth movement, in an attempt to highlight the role that state repression and state strategy plays in shaping religious ideologies, but also briefly consider the role that religion *does* play in shaping how Kashmiris view their struggle for justice. I argue that the Indian state apparatus is able to use the threat of the global Islamist fear by drawing links between the youths and global extremist groups in an attempt to undermine their dissent.

When Wani was killed, the dominant discourse in India referred to him as an Islamic radical and a terrorist, given his affiliation with Hizbul Mujahideen and a number of statements he had made in his YouTube videos that referred to his fight as a jihad against the occupying forces and relied primarily on Islamic idioms. Given the immense amount of support for Wani, in the Indian public’s perception, all Kashmiri Muslims became “Muslim terrorists” or “terrorist sympathizers,” and thus, their desire for self-determination was effectively undermined. In one such prominent example, the Indian journalist Barkha Dutt, in an article in the *Washington Post*, argues that “terrorists have ruined Kashmir,” and that Kashmiris must realize “that terrorists like Zakir Musa or Burhan Wani...are not benefactors, but enemies who have sabotaged and hijacked both their credibility and best interests.”³⁷

Curiously, in Dutt’s article, there is very little mention of the role of the Indian state in promoting this radicalization. By making a slight reference to “historic mistakes of omission and commission,” the state is completely erased from the narrative of militancy and religious radicalization, as if it appeared on its own or was an intrinsic part of Kashmiri resistance. As we have already seen, both the earlier iteration of activists, as well as the youths involved in mass protests starting in 2008, began peacefully, seeking nonviolent means to achieve self-determination. It was only when state repression became heightened that some within the movement turned to more violent or radical means.³⁸

This begs the question: what is the role of religion in the Kashmiri movement? The answer to this question is one that is not palatable to those who wish to see religion as the only driving force, or those who situate it as having no role whatsoever.

Zakir Musa, a Kashmiri militant who became the head of Hizbul Mujahideen after Wani was killed, but later began a new Al-Qaeda inspired outfit, espoused the most explicit expression of radical Islamist ideology in a statement that was released in May 2017. In the statement, Musa threatened to behead pro-freedom leaders for describing the movement as a freedom struggle, saying that the war in Kashmir should not be for an independent state or merger with Pakistan, but “for Islam so that *sharia* is established here.”³⁹ The response amongst a number of youth activists, the pro-freedom Hurriyat leadership, as well as the existing militant outfits, was resolute. They insisted that the portrayal of the struggle as linked to a global Islamist jihad or the creation of a Caliphate was false, and that groups such as “ISIS, Al Qaeda and the Taliban have no role in Kashmir’s struggle.”⁴⁰ They reiterated that

the struggle was one of denied political aspirations and subsequent human rights violations, not a historic conflict between Hindus and Muslims, nor a religious battle. Some also voiced skepticism of the root cause of this purported shift in militant discourse. As with all incidents in Kashmir, questions were raised whether this shift was the ‘work of agencies’ or a fabrication in an attempt to undermine and divide what had effectively become a mass movement of Kashmir’s youth.⁴¹ They noted how the state had caused rifts between various religious communities in the past (for example, the Chittisinghpura massacre, in which 36 Sikhs were killed), in an attempt to make the movement appear as a fundamentalist one. They pointed towards the ways in which particular religious ideologies have been given free rein in Kashmir, while others have met the brunt of state repression.⁴² While it is easier to link the increase in radicalization in response to state repression, it of course becomes harder to prove whether state agencies are actually behind the proliferation of extremist discourses. Nonetheless, the belief among many is that the latter is a possibility, and plays an important role in understanding how various religious ideologies take shape in a contested zone such as Kashmir. As Kashmiri journalist Mir Hilal notes:

Many observers...believe that creating an Islamist bogey in Kashmir is the unconscious desire of the State, if not part of the counterinsurgency project. It serves the Indian state to dismiss pro-freedom demonstrations and stone throwing by schoolgirls as an outcome of radicalisation, preferably religious, instead of having to acknowledge it as an act craving political change.

As many young people articulate, ‘who does it benefit the most to have the Kashmir struggle be one that is linked to a global extremist Islam?’

Nonetheless, Burhan Wani, and others, did join the Hizbul Mujahideen, a religious-political outfit. They believed they were embarking on a *jihad* (struggle) against the Indian state. Their rhetoric incorporates religious language and symbolism. People on the ground respond to this discourse, as their deaths are seen as *shahadat*, or martyrdom. So, how do we understand this particular turn to religion?

While some only see religion, others, mostly on the left, dismiss these factors as simply being instrumental—religion always stands for something else, and comes to symbolize something else. It is used primarily because of its ability to serve as a ‘rallying cry.’ Take, for example, a telling quote by one observer: ‘It is only when you don’t leave people with any choice that they turn to God. That is when Islamisation started.’⁴³ In this view, one’s religious identity is relegated to a particular private sphere, and only emerges once all other options have been spent.

This view is as simplistic as one that solely focuses on the role of religion. It does not take into account the critical role that religious identities have played in shaping Kashmir’s history. Critically, it also assumes a binary between the religious and the secular, a binary that is, as many scholars have argued, not necessarily productive when attempting to understand Muslim societies.⁴⁴ An individual’s religious identity informs how he/she sees the world; in many cases it deeply intersects with a desire to fight for justice, or defines what justice is. It

may shape how one views ‘the political,’ and how one situates their role within this realm. It is, however, not the only factor. Others include ones upbringing, life experience, educational background, and so on.

Religion also plays an important role at the level of community. There is a history of religious identity being used by the state to demarcate particular rights and privileges to certain groups, while also utilizing some groups over others. The religious question is therefore shaped and reshaped by both state and non-state actors. For example, the rise of Hindutva discourses in India have shaped how many Kashmiri Muslims view the Indian state and society, and has played a critical role in consolidating perceptions that they are being targeted for being *Muslims*. This consolidation of *Muslim-ness* then becomes re-articulated in their resistance to the Indian state.

Conclusion

Kashmiri youths are well aware that their struggle for self-determination is of little international concern. With rising authoritarianism and right-wing fervor in India, and continued geopolitical interventions in Pakistan, Kashmir is simply not a policy priority. The perceived intractability of the issue continues, but this might create new opportunities for Kashmiris to take ownership of their cause. Kashmir’s initial revolt has come full circle and a new generation is testing innovative ways of dissent, taking ownership of their narrative, and expanding their solidarity and networks through social media and other mediums. Yet, as this essay has illustrated, this movement is not without its challenges. Given that it continues to be people-led, and is organic, it does not have a leader, nor is there a concrete vision towards how the end—whether it is loosely defined as self-determination or *azadi*, can be achieved. This leaves the movement vulnerable to cooption, as we saw in the case of civil society initiatives, or misrepresentation, as we see in the case of the movement being seen primarily through the lens of Islamic radicalism. As state surveillance and repression is likely to continue, it remains to be seen how the youths will respond to these challenges.

Notes

- 1 In this chapter, I use the term “Kashmir” to refer specifically to the Kashmir Valley, and not the entire Indian-held state of Jammu and Kashmir, as the uprising is most acute in the Valley.
- 2 Indian forces later killed Khalid Wani in 2015 accusing him of serving as an overground worker for the militants. The family alleges that he was tortured and killed in custody for being Burhan’s brother. See Bashaarat Masood, “If my son was killed in encounter, why his body didn’t bear a bullet wound,” *The Indian Express*, April 14, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/if-my-son-was-killed-in-encounter-why-his-body-didnt-bear-a-bullet-wound/> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 3 Mohamad Junaid, “The Restored Humanity of Commander Burhan Wani,” *Raiot*, July 14, 2016, <http://raiot.in/the-restored-humanity-of-the-kashmiri-rebel/> (accessed 25 Sep. 2017).
- 4 Shams Irfan, “Scenes from Burhan Wani’s Funeral,” *The Wire*, August 7, 2017, <https://thewire.in/53549/the-funeral-burhan-wani/> (accessed September 25, 2017).

- 5 A local rebellion against the Dogras was underway in the area of Poonch, which was crushed by the ruler's soldiers, resulting in estimates of 150,000–200,000 people killed and an equal number fleeing to Pakistan. As a result, Muslim tribesmen from northwest Pakistan, that were supported by officials in the Pakistan state, made their way to Kashmir in order to “liberate” Kashmir. The Maharaja sought military help from the newly formed Indian government under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The Government of India made the Dogra ruler sign an Instrument of Accession before it would lend its assistance, and its army officially arrived in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, on October 27, 1947.
- 6 Iffat Malik, *Kashmir: Ethnic Conflict and International Dispute* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 67.
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- 8 “Shopian: Manufacturing a Suitable Story,” Independent Women’s Initiative for Justice, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.southasianrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/IWIJ-Report-Shopian-10-Dec-2009.pdf> (25 September 25, 2017).
- 9 Sanjay Kak, ed., *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir* (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011).
- 10 Uzma Falak, “Poem: PalestineKashmir,” *The Electronic Intifada*, November 18, 2015, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/poem-palestinekashmir/15016> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 11 Malik Sajad, *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (London: Harper Collins, 2015).
- 12 Umar Lateef, “Pitfalls of Collaboration,” *Mashikk*, January 31, 2016, <https://mashikk.wordpress.com/2016/01/31/pitfalls-of-collaboration/> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 13 Mohammad Faysal, “Walking downtown, Trying to Breathe,” *Kashmir Reader*, February 19, 2016, <http://kashmirreader.com/walking-downtown-trying-to-breathe/> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 14 The pro-freedom leadership usually calls for *hartals*, or strikes, after the occurrence of human rights violations by the Indian state. Most businesses, banks, schools, and government offices remain closed and public transportation is limited. Critics of the *hartal* as a protest strategy decry that it harms the Kashmiri economy and keeps children from attending school; the leadership maintains that it is the only form of resistance that Kashmiris can use given the state prohibition of protests and larger public gatherings.
- 15 Muzzammil Thakur (activist) in discussion with the author, February 7, 2016.
- 16 Wajahat Ahmad (Faculty, O.P. Jindal Global University, India) in discussion with the author, February 27, 2016.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Rifat Rathor (journalist) in discussion with the author, September 25, 2017.
- 19 Ahmad, interview with author.
- 20 Wajahat Ahmad, “Prongs of the State, Serving their Master,” *Kashmir Ink*, July 25, 2017, <http://www.kashmirink.in/news/politics/prongs-of-the-state-serving-their-masters/407.html> (25 September 25, 2017).
- 21 Praveen Donthi, “Undercover: Ajit Doval in Theory and Practice,” *Caravan Magazine*, September 1, 2017, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/ajit-doval-theory-practice> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 22 Sushil Aaron, “Narendra Modi is Implementing the Doval Doctrine in Kashmir,” *Hindustan Times*, September 16, 2016, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/narendra-modi-is-implementing-the-doval-doctrine-in-kashmir/story-uPZfR9aNCPwFCD3VkJnWZN.html> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 23 Rathor, interview with author.
- 24 Nagesh Rao, “Kashmir Must Have Nothing Less Than Freedom,” *Socialist Worker*, August 23, 2016, <https://socialistworker.org/2016/08/23/indias-new-crackdown-on-kashmir> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 25 “A ‘Lawless’ Law: Detentions Under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Security Act,” Amnesty International, http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/asa200012011en_11.pdf (accessed September 25, 2017).

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- 27 Dilnaz Boga (journalist and filmmaker) in discussion with the author, February 15, 2016.
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- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Rao, "Kashmir Must Have."
- 32 Dilnaz Boga, "Kashmir Valley's Spiraling Drug Abuse," *Counter Currents*, June 10, 2010, <http://www.countercurrents.org/boga100610.htm> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 33 Ibid.
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- 35 "Kashmir IAS Topper Shah Faesal Slams Media for Putting him in Same Frame as Burhan Wani," *First Post*, July 16, 2016, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/kashmir-ias-topper-shah-faesal-slams-media-for-making-him-part-of-sadistic-propaganda-2896560.html> (accessed September 25, 2017).
- 36 Toufiq Rashid, "ISIS Flags in Kashmir 'more adventure and mischief than inspiration'," *Hindustan Times*, December 26, 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/isis-flags-in-kashmir-more-adventure-and-mischief-than-inspiration/story-ZfufsiXSzsYhNI7ZZfZxO.html> (accessed September 25, 2017).
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- 41 Huffpost Staff, "Al Qaeda Announces."
- 42 In another article, Kashmiri journalist Mir Hilal notes, "There is a single Salafi theology school in Srinagar, which is perhaps the only religious institution that had been cleared by the government for foreign funding." See Mir Hilal, "Why Does India Consistently Push the (False) Narrative of Radicalization in Kashmir?" *Scroll.in*, May 6, 2017, <https://scroll.in/article/836632/why-does-india-consistently-push-the-false-narrative-of-radicalisation-in-kashmir> (accessed September 25, 2017).
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9

MAOISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE OF THE PEOPLE'S WAR IN NEPAL

Subho Basu

On February 4, 1996, a rather unknown political formation called the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) presented the government with a charter of 40 demands. These included abrogating existing treaties with India, stripping the monarchy of all power and privileges, drafting a new constitution by means of a constituent assembly, nationalizing private property, declaring Nepal a secular nation and ending all foreign aid.¹ Sher Bahadur Deuba, then Prime Minister of Nepal, did not pay attention to the demand charter and went on a foreign trip to India.² Deuba was unmoved by such representation as in the first elections held after the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1991, many of these Maoists contested polls as part of the United People's Front of Nepal and obtained a meager nine seats in a house of 210 seats.³ After the election UPFN underwent bewildering splits centered around heuristic ideological debates and personality clashes. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) was born out of these splits. Notwithstanding their marginality in mainstream electoral politics of the then Nepal, on February 13, 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) launched 'people's war' by attacking local police stations in the remote western districts of Rolpa, Rukum and Sindhuli in protest against the 'unresponsive' Nepali state.⁴ Though Maoists lacked sophisticated weapons and a wider mass base in 1996, they started the most violent civil war in modern Nepal that consumed between 13,500 and 16,500 lives.⁵ The civil war displaced over 150,000 people from their rural habitats.⁶

What led to this violent upsurge and civil war? Why did the civil war last so long? Were Maoists ideologically committed to violence? The cultural revolution in China, Naxalite rebellion in India and partly in Bangladesh and the Shining Path movement in Peru, all point towards Maoists as ideologically committed towards violence. While recognizing Maoists' predilection towards violent political action, this chapter seeks to contextualize the expansion of the Maoist base through a revolutionary people's war by offering a social reading of patterns of governance in rural Nepal. In Nepal the monarchical state left the quotidian governance and delivery of social goods in the hands of

local power elites ranging from landholders to government officials. This situation is characterized by everyday violence committed by local elites against subaltern masses. Under monarchical systems of governance, such violence became routinized and a part of quotidian reality and thus appeared legitimate. In moments of political transformation, such as the third wave of democratic upsurge in the 1990s,⁷ expectations of subaltern masses skyrocketed. The slow pace of structural transformation through democracy failed to match the rising expectations of marginalized social classes. Musical chairs played by established political parties in forming ministries for a short span of time⁸ deepened the distrust among the rural poor of government's ability to deliver structural transformations. In such an historic conjecture, Maoist revolutionary violence provided an alternative avenue for the articulation of discontent among a segment of rural youth. Institutional brittleness of the state and intense power struggles among the political parties and monarchical establishments in confronting such revolutionary violence further enabled Maoists to entrench their influence in rural Nepal. Thus, in an historic conjecture of the arrival of democracy, such quotidian state violence created conditions for revolutionary upsurge that descended in endemic bloodshed.

The state formation in Nepal and structural violence in rural society

Nepal emerged as a new principality in 1768 when Prithvi Narayan Shah completed his conquest of the Kathmandu valley.⁹ The birth of Nepal as a state nearly coincided with the rise of English East India Company's state in Bengal in 1757. As Nepal's shah dynasty went on conquering hill principalities, the English East India Company expanded their empire in the north Indian plains and the two expanding imperial formations clashed in 1816, putting an end to Nepal's expansion. As an eighteenth-century South Asian state, Nepal escaped direct colonization and the Shah dynasty continued to rule the hill polity as a buffer state between China and India under the indirect control of the English East India Company.¹⁰ As the dynamism of the expanding Nepali polity was halted, the court witnessed intense fractional struggles and in 1845 Jang Bahadur Kunawar Rana staged a coup by massacring members of the court and many members of the Royal family.¹¹

This event gave birth to a patrimonial state. According to Weber, in patrimonial societies, the state was indeed the personal domain of one or a few leaders. In such instances, significant legitimacy was derived from reciprocities, probably from powerful powerbrokers, that assisted in cementing patrimonial authority of an individual. Through such means leaders sought to exercise authorities over the subject population.¹² Max Weber's definition of patrimonialism is reused by scholars as neo-patrimonialism to denote systems in which political relationships are mediated through personal connections between leaders and subjects as patrons and clients. Under such a system authority and the social linkages through which it is exercised are vested almost as personal property in an individual, rather than in impersonal institutions.¹³ In Nepal, through a famous Lal Panja edict of 1856 Kunawar Rana appointed himself as the hereditary prime minister of the state and also became commander in chief of the army. Influenced by a neighboring ethnographic colonial state and impelled by the

need for legitimatizing his rule, he ordered legal codification of ongoing social stratifications based on caste. In 1854 Rana appointed Brahmin interpreters of canonical laws and ordered his administrators to codify the caste system and they produced *Muluki Ain*, a 1,400-page document that placed Nepali society under a legally anctioned hierarchical Hindu mold.¹⁴

Though *Muluki Ain* was not implemented in its totality, it remained the critical document that solidified processes of social stratification whereby a structural foundation was laid for the social and economic supremacy of Bahun and Khastriyas and the royal Thakuri clan over the rest of the population. In a multi ethnic society the pattern of state formation based on Hindu ideals of a caste system imposed a hierarchy from above that resulted in a complicated process of status formation and deprivation. The state attempted to legitimize such politically orchestrated social stratification as god given. Notwithstanding such ideological justification provided by the patrimonial state, resistances in various forms in different corners of the society emerged. This hierarchy was not without material consequences. Economically, the nineteenth-century Rana regime through the process of centralization syphoned resources from rural areas to Katmandu city through tax collections and tenure arrangements.¹⁵ The Rana regime and its violent social engineering flourished under conditions of indirect colonization of Nepal by the British authorities in India. The British tolerated this peculiar 'oriental despotism' as it vindicated their own orientalist notions of South Asian cultures.

Not surprisingly, as colonial authority retreated from the subcontinent in 1947, discontent against the patrimonial Rana state surfaced in the form of democratic upsurge against the Rana regime. Exiled nationalist leaders associated with Nepali Congress, an organization that was established under the inspiration of Indian socialist leaders such as Rammonhar Lohia and Jayprakash Narayan launched a mass nationalist movement that led to the restoration of monarchy in 1951.¹⁶ India, fearing instability in Nepal, brokered an uneasy co-habitation of monarchy and embryonic democratic political system. The elderly reclusive king Tribhuvan Narayan promised the election of a constituent assembly. After a brief spell of democratic governance in 1959, his son King Mahendra reinstated an absolutist monarchical state. He justified this military backed political coup in the name of preserving Nepali culture and ensuring developmental regime in the kingdom.¹⁷ Nepal thus entered into politics of developmentalism in a situation of counterfeit reality whereby democratic struggle by political parties continued despite their de-recognition by the state.¹⁸ This started a neopatrimonial regime in Nepal that functioned through the distribution of government patronage to local elites elected on an individual basis in local government institutions.

While democratic struggle for the creation of a popular assembly constituted the principle contradiction in the Nepali polity, within democratic camps polarization between the Nepali Congress and an incipient communist movement emerged. In 1949 in Kolkata, the Communist Party of Nepal was formed and challenged the hegemony of Nepali Congress over the democratic struggle.¹⁹ Both political formations were internally fractured by factional squabbles over political strategies and personal ambitions. Nepali Congress emerged as the principal carrier of multi-party democracy and political transformations and the communists strategized to bring

fundamental transformations to the social structure. Both remained at loggerheads with each other and simultaneously opposed the monarchical regime. In April 1990, at the moment of global upsurge of democracy, Nepal witnessed political movements for the restoration of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.

As the Panchayati system based on the 1962 constitution was dissolved by the monarch under popular pressure in 1990, the king appointed an independent Constitution Recommendation Commission to represent the main opposition political formations and prepare a new constitution to accommodate their demands for political reform. There was no attempt to appoint a constituent assembly to draft the constitution. On September 10, 1990, the commission presented King Birendra with the draft of a new constitution, which would preserve the king's status as chief of state under a constitutional monarchy but establish a multiparty democracy. The draft provided the king with major power as he held the position of the commander in chief of the army. Under pressure from the royal quarter, the commission removed a contested provision under which both the constitutional monarchy and multiparty system could have been eliminated by a three-quarters majority vote of Parliament.²⁰ In many ways, the new constitution followed the British parliamentary pluralistic pattern but preserved the position of the monarch as a substantial powerbroker.

In a hyper mobilized multiethnic polity, the restoration of a compromised constitutional democracy led to the emergence of a plethora of movements and claims based upon ethnic considerations. The older social structure based upon the extra economic extraction of labor from a rural agrarian workforce faced radical challenges from NGOs and radical political formations. Though normative electoral democracy produced gridlocked power politics between the Congress and United Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) and various smaller political formations, civil society movements gained momentum and citizens' ability to interrogate and challenge governmental decision-making processes was vastly expanded. In many instances, such movements challenged the norm of extra economic labor extraction methods. The rise of the Kamaya liberation movement was a specific instance of emancipation of labor from the debt bondage system. In Western Nepal debt bondage was an integral component of agrarian production organization. Kamaya is a Tharu word and the system prevailed in Western Nepal's terai region. It originally connoted a person's position in intricate domestic division of labor but gradually came to signify a debt bondage system. The complex interactions among janajatis living in the Terai region and bonded labor system originated with the migration high caste Hindus from hill region to Terai plains contributed to the emergence of Tharu identity. These high caste Hindus, according to Tharu activists, occupied lands from Tharu cultivators through forged loan documents and kept them as bonded workers by charging them spiraling interest rates. In 1985 a new NGO came into existence known as Backward Society Education (BASE). In 1990, with the establishment of democracy, it operated as an NGO and opened 130 branches throughout Nepal.

They pioneered a movement known as the Kamaiya Liberation Movement (Kamaya Mukti Parichalan Samity). In quasi-democratic Nepal after 1990 ILO established ties with local struggles against a bonded labor system. On May 1, 2000, the movement planned liberation of 19 Kama workers from the land of former minister Shivraj Pant. It attracted international attention. Several meetings followed the announcement of May 1. Of these two were prominent: one in early July in Nepalgunj and the other is the mass sit-in at the district head quarter of Bhadrakali to liberate 150 Kamas. On July 17, 2000 government in response to the growing pressure from the movement announced the liberation of 250,000 Kamas. In retaliation, landlords evicted Kamas from their homes and plots of land they cultivated. This obviously undermined the economic position of Kamayas and the struggle continued.²¹ But this movement is an example of how the advent of a quasi-democratic structure of governance created a wider platform for struggles against quotidian oppression and faced violence from landlords. The self-mobilization by Tharus demonstrate that members of subaltern classes had gained new access to bargaining strategies vis-à-vis the state and techniques of resistance that were linked to practices of open society.

The existence of the caste system and the practice of untouchability further enhanced the plight of the working poor. The practice of untouchability was part of the state formation process in Nepal. King Jaysthi Malla (1380–1394) in Kathmandu valley issued the first edict against artisanal service castes declaring their work to be polluting enough that they deserved segregation. Jung Bahadur Kunwar Rana's Muluki Ain further reinforced such edicts and declared certain artisanal service groups whose touch would require purification through sprinkling of water. Though untouchability was prohibited through state legislation in 1963, Dalits remained victims of structural violence. Constituting 12.9% of the population in Nepal, according to 2001 statistics, Dalits at the beginning of the new century had the lowest per capita income in Nepal, and the lowest per capita land with nearly 50% suffering from malnutrition. Dalit children faced discriminations in rural schools and Dalits had little access to government jobs. In the early decade of the twenty-first century, as there existed no provision for affirmative action in Nepal, there was no Dalit member of parliament. Within Dalits, women constituted the most deprived population. While the literacy rate among the general population stood at 66%, it remained 7% among Dalit women. Although internally stratified by caste hierarchy and regional differences in terms of the social organization of the caste system, poverty discrimination and social exclusion constituted common experiences of the Dalit population and a silent quotidian violence against the Dalit population persisted in Nepal.²² The establishment of a quasi-democratic structure in Nepal in 1990 led to the self-mobilization of Dalits through NGOs and party political organizations.

The everyday governance and the relationship between local bureaucrats responsible for developmental programs and peasants were also not free from tensions. Local bureaucrats often visited peasant households and demanded free hospitality in return for minimal government services. The failed land reforms also led to the concentration

of 50% of the land in the hands of 6% of landowners.²³ The installation of a democratic form of governance initiated overall economic and social progress between 1990 and 1996. According to the World Bank, the GDP per capita in Nepal grew at the average rate of 5% from 1990 to 1996. In the same period, the distribution of telephone lines doubled. Infant mortality declined from 99 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 63 in 2000. The youth literacy rate increased from 50% in 1991 to 70% in 2001.²⁴ Yet urban bias in the development process prevented the percolation of such gains to rural Nepal where a majority of people resided. The caste system again concentrated professional jobs and trade in the hands of Bahun and Chetris and to some extent Newars. More importantly democracy heightened the expectations of the people but the slow progress in rural areas did not match their expectations.

While such quotidian violence and inequity was embedded within the societal structure of Nepali polity, the advent of a quasi-democratic era in 1990 had unleashed a two-way process in relation to violence. The quasi-democratic reforms opened up avenues for articulating grievances for subaltern social classes and the possibilities of inventions of new identities, rhetoric and cultural narrative that challenge constructed structural hierarchies of monarchical Hindu polity in Nepal. But it also created space for violence indulged in by ruling political entities such as Nepali Congress for narrow party political gains and thus legitimized violence as a critical source of political transaction and transformation. For example, in 1995 Kum Bahadur Khadka, the home minister from the Nepali Congress unleashed a process of violent suppression of Maoists in Rolpa and Rukum districts.²⁵ There were even allegations of rape and torture by young village women against police.²⁶ Maoists survived the turf war and the police repression convinced them to embrace the new doctrine of people's war based on the political practice of Shining Path in Peru and Naxalite movement near home.

Naxalite Movement, Shining Path, and Nepali Maoism: violence as a political doctrine

On May 18, 1967 in Bengal a powerful Maoist revolutionary movement started in the Naxalbari village in Silguri in West Bengal India. Led by radicals within the then Communist Party of India (Marxist), local tribal sharecroppers made an attempt to redistribute land among landless peasants and engaged in conflicts with local landlords and police forces. This event led to the birth of a third stream of Communist movement in India inspired by Mao's ideas of people's war.²⁷ The primary theoretical premise of the movement was based upon Chinese people's liberation army ideologue Lin Biao. In a series of articles entitled 'Long live the victory of People's War' Lin Biao in 1965 argued about the encirclement of imperialist North America and Europe through the revolutionary struggle in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Describing Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the countryside of the world he drew parallels with the Chinese revolution whereby revolutionary sources in the countryside surrounded the city, the nerve center of Chinese nationalist power and occupying Japanese forces.²⁸ This thesis gained wider popularity among radical students affiliated with the CPI(M)

and led to an alliance among student radicals and organizers of peasant revolution in Naxalbari. There came into existence a committee for the assistance of a Naxalbari peasant struggle. A stream of this revolutionary political current manifested itself in the establishment of CPI(M-L) on May 1, 1970. Charu Mazumder, the principal ideological pathfinder of this party, gave a call for individual assassination of 'class enemies.' In a call to party comrades he asserted:

If guerilla fighters start the battle of annihilation with their conventional weapons, the common landless and poor peasants will come forward with bare hands and join the battle of annihilation. A common landless peasant, ground down by age old oppression, will see the light and avenge himself on the class enemy. His initiative will be released. In this way the peasant masses will join the guerilla fighters, their revolutionary enthusiasm will know no bounds and a mighty wave of peoples upsurge will sweep the country.²⁹

This line of thought put faith in a revolutionary spectacle of violence, a violence that would involve brutal murder of class enemies and would supposedly release the class hatred among the oppressed peasantry.

As the epicenter of the Naxalite movement was located at the border of Nepal, it had attracted the attention of Nepali youths. In 1971 an armed peasant struggle was initiated by Nepali Marxists-Leninists in Jhapa, a border region of West Bengal. Organizers of the Jhapa movement attacked village landlords and tried to mobilize peasants. The government suppressed the movement ruthlessly and many cadres of Nepali Maoists were killed. But the Jhapa movement gave birth to both leaders of Maoist revolutionaries and parliamentary communists.³⁰ Those who were repelled by the futility of violent resistance moved slowly to a democratic underground struggle against the monarchical regime and gave birth to CPN (M-L) in 1978 and in 1990 they came together with CPN(M), another communist party, and formed CPN (UML), the largest parliamentary communist formation in Nepal. Nonetheless, there existed a small but determined group of Maoist revolutionaries who remained committed to the idea of agrarian revolution. These Communists known as the Communist party of Nepal (fourth convention) remained convinced of the idea of Maoism and further split after the fall of the Gang of Four in China into two groups: the original fourth convention and Mashal or torch, led by Mohan Bikram Singh.³¹ In March 1984 Mashal sent a delegation to London for a convention of Maoist political parties and became one among many founding member of the Revolutionary International Movement (RIM). One of the founding members of RIM from that convention was the Partido Comunista Peruano -- Sendero Luminoso (PCP-SL) ('Peruvian Communist Party -- Shining Path').³²

Thus an ideological tie between the Shining Path and Nepali Revolutionary Maoist Communist movement existed from the beginning and Nepali Maoists looked towards the Shining Path for tactical maneuvering. The similarities in terms of the diverse ethnic composition of the Himalayan Kingdom and Andean Peru made Nepali Communists close observers of shining path strategies. During 1995 after the

birth of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) the Shining Path strategies inspired Nepali Maoists to launch a people's war. The shining path movement's violence and civil war paralyzed the Andean region in Peru throughout the 1980s and early 1990s until the capture and imprisonment of Abimale Guzman who rechristened himself with a revolutionary name Gonzalo and was called by his supporters as Chairman Gonzalo.³³ In Nepal too, during the 'people's war,' Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal came to be known as Prachanda and his strategic theoretical formulations were called Prachanda Path.³⁴

Agrarian question and the violence of the People's War

The 'people's war' started in midwestern Hills Rukum and Rolpa where the agrarian system was still based upon rural landlordism.³⁵ According to the 2001 agriculture census in Nepal about 5% of households own 37% of arable land, whereas 47% of households own only 15% of arable land with an average farm size of 0.5 hectares.³⁶ The 2001 population census maintains about 25% of households are landless, about 28% are marginal cultivators (between 0.21–1 hectares), and about 20% are small cultivators (1.01–2 hectares).³⁷ Maoist insurgents first targeted landlords and their allies in the local government and killed them or drove them out of the region. As the hold of the landlord class weakened through violence, Maoists redistributed their land, cancelled debt agreements between landlords and villagers. They also forced local government officials to resign, and formed 'people's governments' in the villages by recruiting cadres from the peasants. Maoist violence thus effectively destroyed the clientelist obligations that had bound peasants to landlords, government officials and moneylenders.³⁸ Thus the people's war in the initial phases followed the famous pattern of peasant rebels confronting and disarming sarkar, sahuakar, and zamindars as envisioned by Ranajit Guha in his famous treatise on peasant insurgencies in colonial India.³⁹

The violence, however, took a significant human toll. The People's War evolved through several stages. The first phase took place between 1996 and 2001 when Maoists confronted rickety ill-armed police forces of Nepal. Between 1996 and 2001, the state machinery adopted repressive measures against Maoists. This intensified conflicts and the death toll mounted. In July 2001 the government and Maoists reached a ceasefire agreement that lasted only four months. According to Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), at the time of the ceasefire 1,689 people had been killed. Of these victims, 971 people had been killed by the state and 718 had been killed by the Maoists.⁴⁰ While the Maoists targeted primarily landed elites, moneylenders and middle class salaried professionals leading to their exodus from insurgency impacted regions, the government obtained information from these landholders and targeted economically disenfranchised segments who were presumed to be the main constituents of Maoists.⁴¹

The second phase started in 2001 when the army was called in and a state emergency was declared. King Ganyendra, who succeeded to the throne after the death of King Birendra, called in the army. The international political climate changed after 9/11 and both the United States and India supplied arms to the Royal army and the United States placed Maoists on the list of international

terrorist organizations.⁴² Maoists also formed a People's Liberation Army to combat state forces. As the ceasefire ended, in November 2001, the government announced a state of emergency and, deployed the army to suppress the Maoist insurgency. The army mounted operations in local communities in rural areas and the intensity of conflicts led to the death of 4,500 people in 2002.⁴³ In October 2002 the king assumed direct control of the administration but failed to eradicate Maoist resistance. The third phase of the people's war started in 2003 when various parts of rural areas in Nepal came under Maoist control and the king alienated established parliamentary parties. Despite such developments, the brutal methods of military operation compelled Maoists to return to the negotiation table in January 2003 followed by another three rounds of negotiations in August 2003. But Maoist insistence on the election of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution led to a deadlock in the negotiation. According to the government of Nepal's estimation, the Maoists at that time had 5,500 active combatants, another 8,000 militia, 4,500 full-time cadres, 33,000 hardcore followers, and 200,000 sympathizers.⁴⁴ They also had control over vast tracks of rural areas. It was at this stage of insurgency where the Maoists formed their own 'people's government,' or 'Jana Sarkar,' and their own judicial system, called the people's court which functioned like a kangaroo court.⁴⁵

Many appointments to Jana Sarkar were made without the consent of villagers who were politically neutral. The villagers accepted forced appointments as otherwise Maoists cadres would suspect them of being sympathetic to the government. In many instances, Maoists abducted young adult children to indoctrinate them, make them perform their dances and song, and use them as part of cultural troupes. There existed a cultural of fear among villagers that was sustained through rumors about punishment. Sometimes there were severe punishments given to those who were perceived to be government spies or who had transgressed social morals according to Maoist rules.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the state attempts at suppressing the rebellion led to more killings of suspected Maoists in the villages. Rural people interacted with Maoists but the army remained a distant impersonal force who came from outside and mounted random operations by ferrying the troops in helicopters.⁴⁷ This created a political culture of fear in rural areas but Maoists also entrenched themselves in rural areas with their operational bases in forests.

Maoists social engineering and responses from below

As Maoists established themselves in rural areas, they engaged in social engineering in the areas under their control. In some areas Maoists violated local customary expectations of death rituals and faced popular resistance. In Dullu village of Dhaulikh province there took place a confrontation between Maoists and local people, including women, over the lackadaisical attitude of Maoists in reaching the village when one member of jana sarkar was killed by the army. But Saubhagya Shah, through a detailed ethnography based on testimonies of displaced people from the region, traced the anger of the villagers against the Maoists' attempt at social

engineering. He attributed the reasons for the anger of villagers to the Maoists' attempts at sweeping social changes. Maoists banned polygamy, untouchability, gambling, and drinking. They also prohibited customary rites, including marriage ceremonies, death rituals, and ancestral offerings. They even imposed restrictions on the celebration of the Dashain and Tihar festivals, the most important rituals observed by Nepali Hindus. Maoists also discouraged villagers from worshipping in Hindu temples. They harassed the priests and even broke the leg of a 72-year-old priest in Dailekh province.⁴⁸ As a consequence, the priests stopped performing rituals at temples and family ceremonies.

The new regime's attempts to root out the shamanistic form of Hinduism led them to physically assault those persons who acted as spirit mediums and oracle tellers. The destruction of temples, government buildings, and historic monuments by Maoists was an attempt at erasing local cultural traditions that Maoists regarded as feudal and exploitative. Even secular fairs, which served as rural markets and occasions for trading, singing, dating, and general merriment, were prohibited. People were forced to eat beef and even marriages were organized between Dalits and high castes to destroy the basis of caste structure. Maoists attempted to replace these traditional religious rituals with their own revolutionary songs, music, political drama, and dances.⁴⁹ These Communist cultural activities constituted one of the key instruments of mass education, indoctrination, and mobilization by the Maoists. Villagers in Dullu and adjoining regions reacted against such encroachments upon what they perceived as integral component of their rural life and self-mobilized themselves against the incipient Maoist regime.⁵⁰

Civil war and the impact of violence on rural women

The Maoist movement in Nepal had a reformist agenda regarding gender relationships. The prohibition of alcohol consumption and gambling attracted popular support from women as alcohol consumption was the most critical source of domestic violence. As the movement progressed, Maoists attempted to suppress polygamy and untouchability that also gained popularity among rural women. Maoists tried to recruit women into their movement through an organization called the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), or ANWA(R). ANWA(R) also worked towards ending discrimination against widows through widow remarriage and discouraged practicing customs associated with widowhood.⁵¹ These were novel social movements at the grassroots level and many women actively supported such social reform policies. In many areas USAID-sponsored literacy programs created new conscientiousness among women. Yet while USAID-sponsored programs provided instrumentalist consumerist ideas of joining with market forces, Maoists movements promised emancipation from unequal social relationships and realization of self-potential for women as productive social persons.⁵² Many women identified with Maoists because of their moral ideas of self-sacrifice for higher goods and police personnel identified Maoists' ideological commitment and work towards greater causes.⁵³ Nonetheless, such movements also had a violent side. Maoists attacked alcohol manufacturing units in rural areas and violently punished polygamists. These activities

soon attracted police repression and close to a thousand women were arrested and sent to prison in 1997–98. Many women who lost their brothers or husbands or fathers joined the Maoists in the forests.⁵⁴

Those who joined the Maoists broke irreparably existing social ties with their natal families. Many recruits were young women who were left with no other alternatives but to join them. Though Maoists claimed that women enjoyed equal status in the People's Liberation Army and were made area commanders, in most instances women did not progress beyond their local and district level ranks and thus remained a significant but marginalized force within the Maoist organizations. This also led towards militarization of rural areas with further forced or voluntary recruitments of rural young women and men in the Maoist army or associated organizations. Feminist writers on the people's war commented that many young girls also participated as combatants in a desire to gain recognition for women as an historic force. The Nepali history of resistance against the patrimonial Rana state had valorized men fighters as martyrs but the same role was denied to women resisters. In the modern twenty-first century, ideologically committed Maoist women in their eagerness to fight and revenge the murder of their comrades also sought social recognition outside the gender specific role assigned to them.⁵⁵ They desired recognition as the agents of historical transformation.

As Maoists gained strength in rural areas government forces stepped up indiscriminate attacks on the rural population in general. Women were targets of security forces and in many instances they were raped, tortured, and killed. Maoists retaliated by killing local government officials, including teachers and landlords who were suspected to be police informers, and attacked the development infrastructure.⁵⁶ They also demanded donations from middle class people and attacked their properties if they did not provide donations. The Maoists forced villagers to attend their cultural functions and even kidnapped relatives to compel other family members to join their people's army.⁵⁷ For peasants, they followed the principle of one volunteer for every household.⁵⁸ This resulted in the temporary movement of middle classes from rural areas to urban areas. From peasant households many young men fled from Maoist areas and their agricultural properties were tended by women and the old and infirm. Female-headed households became normal in many villages of western Nepal where Maoist insurgency was widespread.⁵⁹ Though such female-headed households were being interpreted by some scholars as symbolic emancipation of women's labor, in the absence of concomitant changes in social structure and cultural perception of gendered division of labor, others suspect women simply had to bear the double burden of insurgency for their culturally specific roles' gendered division of labor.

This escalation of conflicts generated insecurity among the rural population and fear of bodily harm including death became endemic. This led to the internal displacement of the rural population who fled the conflict zones to urban areas. NGO reports placed the number of internally displaced people to between 100,000 to 500,000 though government sources claimed only 5,000 people were displaced in order to avoid taking responsibilities for relief measures.⁶⁰ Displaced people agitated for refugee status, but the government detained them, tear-gassed them and ignored their voices.

The Maoists killed the leader of the displaced persons. Young women had to bear the burden of being displaced persons. Insurgency increased the sex trade whereby young women displaced from their natal villages sold sex in parlors, restaurants, and bars in urban areas of Nepal. Many young women crossed the national boundaries and worked in brothels in Indian cities.⁶¹ Men were recruited by various levels of foreign labor contracting bodies and were even transported to other conflict zones in the world such as Iraq or were subjected to slave labor conditions. But women were compelled to bear the double burden of the bio-politics of labor in a given gender specific division of labor.

Finally, there occurred militarization of gender relationships. While Maoist women soldiers claimed before journalists that rifles was their jewelry, the government also started recruiting women into the force. In 2003 the then Royal Nepal Army also opened its door to women. Nearly 100 combatant positions were created for women in the army. Over 1,300 applications were submitted for these positions.⁶² This created a potential situation for women violently confronting women and militarization of a gender relationship without changes in cultural perceptions of gendered divisions of labor or female subjugation to patriarchy. Most of these low level combatants were recruits from poor Dalit or Janjati groups and thus this increased the possibility of poorer women confronting and dying in a civil war-like situation. The People's war was thus pregnant with many contradictory possibilities. It created opportunities for social reforms and questioned Hinduized gendered norms that marginalized women but also brought in displacement and militarization of gender relationships without any visible alteration in gender status except for utopian ideological expectation of emancipation in the future.

Conclusion

The People's war in Nepal was a product of a situation raising expectations and delaying progress in structural transformation and improvements in living standards in rural poor and marginal segments of the population. Continued quotidian violence against oppressed minorities in a situation of declining cultural hegemony of a Hinduized patrimonial monarchical state obviously opened up multiple possibilities of challenging the status quo. Turf war initiated by the Nepali Congress government in 1995 and the unprecedented police oppression against rural population in Rolpa and Rukum created widespread discontent against state orchestrated violence. But the Maoist people's war, its emphasis on violence as transformative tactics and guerilla warfare as the only path for salvation, created a civil war that led to mass killings, displacement of populations, militarization of women, and an overall political culture of society and a steady erosion in a shared lived world.

A political culture of fear, distrust, and militant masculinity descended on Nepal between 1996 and 2006. There is no doubt that the patrimonial Hinduized monarchical system was repressive and caused ideological and structural subjugation of a majority from the rural population. It was also true that the parliamentary system produced gridlocked political situations based on clientelist mobilization that

marginalized reformist communists who voiced a change in unresolved agrarian conditions. But the people's war replaced it with more violence, death, and destruction. In 2006 mass rebellion against an authoritarian monarchy produced a peace accord between the Maoists, political parties, and the state. A constituent assembly was elected and former Maoists performed electorally well. However, the same political gridlock continued in preventing the enactment of a new constitution. Rather a second election of the constituent assembly and a devastating natural disaster acted as a catalyst for production of a constitution for the federal secular democratic republic of Nepal.

Notes

- 1 40-point charter of demands submitted by the Maoists to the Prime Minister of Nepal on February 4, 1996 signed by Dr Baburam Bhattarai Chairman Central Committee, United People's Front, Nepal, quoted in Deepak Thapa, ed., *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal* (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2003), 391.
- 2 Pankaj Mishra, "The 'People's War,'" *London Review of Books* 27, no. 12 (June 2005): 3–10.
- 3 See Website of Election Commission of Nepal, quoted in Ali Riaz and Subho Basu, *Paradise Lost: State Failure in Nepal* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 160.
- 4 For details regarding split Dipak Thapa and Bandita Sijapati, *A Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency* (New York: Zed Books, 2004), 43–45.
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10

STRATEGIC LOGIC OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

Farhat Haq

The Urdu word *qabza* provides us with a conceptual map to comprehend the strategic logic of political violence in Pakistan. Possession is the literal meaning of the word *qabza* but it has taken on other connotations in Pakistani political discourse over the past three decades. It is most often invoked as a term for taking possession of land through the threat of violence; one hears frequently of *qabza* groups or land mafia taking over public or private land through the use of force. But one does not get *qabza* only through the use of violence as creating fake legal documents is an essential part of taking possession. Thus *qabza* implies a claim that is always open to challenge or contestation. It also exemplifies the interplay between violence and legality; exerting only force may not produce the results one wants but neither does the use of legal mechanisms. A similar tug-of-war occurs in the political arena where groups use both violence and elections to maintain their claim over a share of the public sphere. Most of the political violence in Pakistan in the last three decades stems from the contest between various groups to take possession literally of public resources and metaphorically of what it means to be a Pakistani. Matthew Hull illustrates the process whereby the official maps of CDA (Capital Development Authority) meant to aid in the orderly planning of Islamabad contributed to a 'new arena of competition and conflict between Islamic sects'.¹

The original planners envisioned 'ecumenical' mosques serving the needs of worshippers in residential areas. Starting in 1978, the sectarian affiliation of mosques became a central issue, creating an ongoing site of religious controversy. Mosques are, in theory, open to all Muslims for prayers. But increasingly mosques have become identified with a particular group whereby the affiliation with a particular *maslak* (sect) is indexed through subtle differences in the manner of prayer, such as whether one says *ameen* loudly or quietly, on the content of sermons, and by the background of members of mosque committees. This fluidity in affiliation has made mosques an arena of sectarian competition. The CDA official maps can provide a clue as to where the

designated mosque site might be in the future development of a sector. Various sectarian groups have attempted to claim the area by building a temporary structure, often overnight. These sectarian groups then use the threat of violence and legal mechanisms to shore up their claim. In response to such *qabza*, the CDA has started to disguise mosque sites as schools and parks on planning maps.

Contested sovereignties

Starting from the mid-1980s political violence became an important dynamic in shaping Pakistani politics. Though political violence was a foundational element in the birth of nation-states in the Indian Subcontinent, in Pakistan, the strategic use of violence by a variety of political players became prominent starting in the mid-1980s. Though it is often assumed that states jealously guard the legitimate use of violence, in the case of Pakistan, the 'state' has at times willingly shared 'legitimate use of violence' with non-state actors to achieve strategic aims. Second, political scientists continue to view the state as a unitary actor though we are mindful of a continuum of state capacities ranging from weak to strong. It is important to remind ourselves that the actual operation of the state is anything but unitary and efficient. Phillip Abrams admonishes us to not be fooled by the fiction of state as a reality that stands behind political practices; instead, to see it as the ideological artefact that assigns 'unity, morality and independence to the disunited, amoral and dependent workings of the practice of government'.²

In the case of Pakistan, the civil-military relations add further complexity to the fiction of the state as a unitary actor. The contest between the interests and goals of the so-called 'deep state' or 'the establishment' or the army and its intelligence wings and democratically elected governments is an important variable in apprehending the dynamic of political violence in Pakistan. Third, the literature in political science has generally assumed that there is a divide between 'extremists' groups who use violence to achieve their aims and 'moderate' groups who take part in elections and are willing to engage in the 'give-and-take' of ordinary politics. This is often described as the 'participation/moderation' thesis, that democratic processes and the ability to participate in elections can moderate the agenda and behavior of militant groups over time.³ But the case of Pakistan demonstrates the futility of separating the normal realm of politicking through elections, alliances, and bargaining from violent clashes, armed groups, and criminal gangs. Rather than viewing violence as an 'extraordinary' means for achieving political goals, the Pakistani case forces us to pay attention to the interplay between legality and criminality, violence and peace, ballots and bullets.

A study of political violence in Pakistan from 1988–2010 documents the roots of political violence in different parts of the country. In Sindh, for instance, the greatest source of political violence is targeted assassinations of political rivals. 'Sindh leads rest of the provinces in assassinations by a wide margin, reporting 4,182 assassinations causing 6,357 casualties. Both casualty figures are much higher than the larger province Punjab. In per capita terms, Sindh has the largest concentration of assassination, even taking into account the recent trend of drone strikes in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)'.⁴ Over 90% of political assassinations occurred in Karachi. The primary

source of political violence in the Punjab from mid-1980s to 2010 is sectarian whereas Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) experienced lower level of political violence until 2005. The roots of political violence in different parts of Pakistan can be traced to regional conflicts; in Karachi it was the ethnic competition between Mohajirs, Pathans, and Punjabis; in Punjab the sectarian conflict can be traced to the Shia-Sunni contestation and much of the political violence in Baluchistan stems from Baluchi separatist sentiments as well as the arrival of various Taliban elements after 9/11. FATA and KPK experienced higher levels of political violence starting in 2005 because the region became the frontline on the 'war against terror.' The roots of these conflicts are varied but I want to point to a common pattern in which groups engage in competition by using violence and electioneering. I will focus on three conflicts to illustrate this pattern: (a) Muttahida Qaumi Movement's (MQM's) use of violence to contain opposition and maintain control in Karachi from 1988–2015, (b) sectarian conflict in Punjab as exemplified by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a militant Deobandi Sunni group, and (c) the emergence of Barelvi militancy since 2012.

Ballots and bullets and emergence of *Mohajir* political identity in Karachi

Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan is often given the moniker of 'little Pakistan' because it is a magnet for those seeking employment opportunities from all over Pakistan. As such the changing ethnic composition of the city creates competition over who controls what parts of the city. Though recent demographic changes may have rendered the status of Urdu-speaking scions of refugees from India, or the Mohajirs, from majority to the largest minority in the city, they continue to be the most significant group in Karachi.

In this section I will discuss the forces that shaped *Mohajir* political identity in the mid-1980s and how it led to what Laurent Gayer has termed 'ordered disorder'⁵ in the largest metropolis in Pakistan and what it tells us about the strategic logic of political violence. Though journalistic accounts have described Karachi in the 1990s as the Beirut of South Asia and later as the 'most dangerous city' in the world, Karachi continues to be a thriving commercial hub contributing 70% of the income tax paid, 25% of the overall GDP and over 90% of the international trade. It is this liminal status of Karachi as both the 'Beirut of South Asia,' or the 'New Hong Kong' of South Asia that led Gayer to describe the situation as 'ordered disorder' where: 'Far from being entropic, Karachi's polity is predicated upon routines of organization, interpretation and action that have made violence *manageable*, both at the level of the city at large and at the micro-level of its populations'.⁶

Before the partition of the Indian subcontinent, Muslim political and cultural centers of gravity existed in the upper Ganges valley, U.P. Oudh and C.P, the heartland of modern India. 'Here the community (Muslims) was a minority of some 13% but as a whole it was more influential, more prosperous and better educated than its coreligionists in other provinces of British India'.⁷ The Muslim majority provinces or what became Pakistan: East Bengal, Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and NWFP were at

the periphery of what in the Subcontinent became known as the 'Muslim' culture. First Persian, and Arabic and later Urdu, was the medium of expression for this Muslim 'Shurafa' culture which closely identified with the Mughal heritage. Whereas the Muslims in the minority provinces tended to live in urban areas, owned land, were literate and increasingly drawn into the service of the colonial states, the majority Muslims in what became Pakistan were rural, preliterate, culturally very close to their Hindu counterparts. According to the 1951 Census in Pakistan, over 55% of Karachi's population consisted of the refugees from these Muslim minority provinces.

During the 1950s and early 1960s the Urdu-speaking *Mohajirs*, along with the Punjabis, were dominant in the political and bureaucratic arena. For these centrist political elites, Urdu as the national language became the foundation for engineering a common national outlook among this multi-ethnic state. Urdu-speaking *Mohajirs* viewed themselves as real Pakistanis because they had made the most sacrifice for this separate homeland for Muslims. But by the end of the 1960s the rising power of the military pushed the Urdu speaking elites to the status of junior partners of the Punjabis in the political arena. The idea that Urdu language and 'shurafa' culture provided the framework for a Pakistani identity was increasingly challenged by rising nationalist sentiments of the Bengali, Baluch, Pathans, and Sindhis. 'The dominant Mohajir response to the trend was to oppose ethnic particularism, support centrist forces, and lean towards 'Islamic' parties. Jamaat-i-Islam, for example, performed best in Urban Sindh with the *Mohajir* support in the 1970 election'.⁸

The first half of the 1970s was a traumatic period for the *Mohajirs*. The successful secession movement in East Pakistan and the emergence of the first popularly elected government headed by a populist Sindhi, ZA Bhutto, resulted in a fundamental shift in *Mohajir* politics. The creation of Bangladesh seriously challenged the concept of a 'Muslim Pakistani' identity based on the 'two nation' theory, and dealt a blow to the hegemony of shurafa Urdu speaking culture. The 'language controversy' and the 'quota question' during the Bhutto regime added to the *Mohajir* insecurities. Under Bhutto's regime, Sindh was given 19% share in the federal bureaucracy. For federal and provincial bureaucracy and for admissions in educational institutions, further allocation was made on rural (60%) and urban (40%) bases. The Sindh Assembly passed a bill in 1972 to promote Sindhi language in the province. The new policy required teaching of Sindhi as a second language for those students not receiving their instruction in Sindhi and made it mandatory for provincial government officials to learn Sindhi within a specified period. *Mohajirs* reacted sharply against the new language policy. 'Serious linguistic riots broke out over the issue in 1972 and some refugees proposed cutting a 'Mohajaristan' out of Sind, reinforced by Biharis brought from Bangladesh'.⁹

Many *Mohajirs* joined the anti-Bhutto platform of the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) for the 1977 elections. Initially, Zia Ul Haq's military rule was supported by most *Mohajirs* but the decade long military rule of Zia Ul Haq solidified Punjabi dominance. In ethnic terms the Pushtoons clearly emerged as the junior partners of the Punjabis in the military and bureaucracy. The share of the *Mohajirs* in the civil bureaucracy was further reduced under Zia. Punjabi and Pushtoon Generals not only

ran the provincial government of Sind, but 'many of the important civil service positions in the province were filled by the Punjabis. ... Punjabi presence in Karachi's universities, colleges, bazaars and housing societies became ever more striking'.¹⁰

The response of the *Mohajir* younger generation to this relative decline in their position compared to other ethnic groups was to assert that rather than insisting on a unitary Pakistani national identity, they should highlight the particular roots of Urdu-speaking *Mohajir* that unites them. A poster for the All Pakistan *Mohajir* Student Organization (APMSO) proposed the following formula for what unites the *Mohajirs*.

Who am I? I am an echo of 1857 war of liberation, I am consciousness of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, I am the movement of Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed, I am the courage of Muhammad Ali Juhair, I am the dispossessed caravan of the partition of 1947, I am the frozen blood of East Pakistan of 1971, (And) I am that patriotic Pakistan who became invisible. (But) why am I not in Pakistan, because I was dispossessed, I was despised, and I am asked? Where were you parents born? I was told that you are not the son of soil. I was deprived of admissions (to educational institutions) deprived of job opportunities, I said, I was a patriotic Pakistani, but I was reminded constantly that I was a mohajir, an outsider answer, a '*mukir*,' '*thilier*,' '*Maturva*,' (ethnic slurs).

The twenty-something *Mohajir* men both celebrated the claim that only their group stood for a united Pakistani identity but also warned their elders that a claim to territory is essential for the survival of the group. The turn away from the deterritorialized *sharif* cultural identity and insistence on control of Karachi as the only means for survival of the group added justification for violence. MQM insisted that because their sacrifices are not rewarded, instead they are treated as outsiders and interlopers, *Mohajirs* have to use violence to reclaim their fair share. In a pamphlet entitled: 'Muhajir Nationalism and Territory', Imran Farooq, a leader of MQM addressed the question of territorial claim. He argued that without claim to a land *Mohajirs* would never be accepted as equal in Pakistan.¹¹

Muhajirs must understand that those who do not cherish and love the land they inhabit may end up losing any land to live on. They may find themselves rootless and without a direction. ... Just like a child is dispossessed without love of his mother, a nation is dispossessed without love of land. Those who do not love the land they occupy suffer the consequences. This generation of *Mohajirs* is suffering from the mistakes of its forefathers.¹²

Mohajirs as settlers

Rasool Bux Palijo, a Sindhi nationalist leader compared the *Mohajir* in Sindh to White settlers in Africa.¹³ He pointed to their economically privileged position, their sense of social superiority, their dominance of urban Sindh, and their refusal to learn Sindhi

despite living in the province for forty-five years, as proof that they resembled colonizing settlers. This counter discourse of 'Mohajirs as settlers' became deeply threatening to the Urdu-speaking residents of urban Sindh. Biharis in East Pakistan identified with the center, spoke Urdu, and during the civil war they actively assisted the Pakistani army. Given that history, after the formation of Bangladesh, they were to be repatriated to Pakistan. But only a small percentage of them made it to Pakistan and most of them settled in Karachi. The repatriation became an intensely politicized issue. The Sindhi leaders opposed it on the grounds that outsiders already swamped their province, other provinces did not want them. Many of the top leaders of the MQM are Biharis, and repatriation of all Biharis was one of the central demands of the MQM. But the Biharis in Bangladesh camps became a symbol of what can happen to Mohajirs if Sindhudash (an independent state for Sindhis) becomes a reality. To stake a claim on Sindh as the land for *Mohajirs* and Sindhis serves another important goal, it delegitimizes the more recent migration from the Punjab and North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Thus MQM demanded that only those who live, work, and spent their money in Sindh ought to have the domicile (a document which may provide access to jobs and admissions) of Sindh.

The land settlement pattern in Karachi added to the insecurity felt by millions of *Mohajirs*. Over 94% of the land that makes up metropolitan Karachi was public land that is administered by a myriad of local, provincial and federal agencies.¹⁴ Over half of the Karachi's population lives in what are known as '*kachi abadis*' or informal housing developed through illegal use of public land.¹⁵ For the *Mohajirs* housing insecurity started when their parents or grandparents came to Karachi as refugees after the Partition. Many of the refugees occupied squatter settlements. This informal sector continued to expand with the arrival of job seekers from other parts of Pakistan. Those living in the informal sector face a variety of insecurities; their access to services such as water and electricity is uncertain, with increasing property value, many face the prospect of eviction or demolition of their homes. 'Many of these evictions and demolitions violate state laws and procedures, but they are made possible by a powerful politician-bureaucratic-developer nexus which takes advantage of ambiguous land titles, application of incomplete legal decree, badly planned infrastructure and urban upgrading projects'.¹⁶ The legal uncertainties, overlapping jurisdiction, and land as one of the most prized investments against inflation makes real estate ripe for *qabza* groups. Property dealers (*dalals*) become an important force in squatter settlements. The ethnic composition of these agents changed in the 1980s when Pathan arms dealers, businessmen and drug kingpins started investing in real estate. Many of the Pathan-controlled settlements were next to the *mohajir* settlements mostly occupied by Biharis.

The ever-present problem of public transportation became the flame that ignited a major riot between Pathans and Biharis in 1985, plunging Karachi into an inferno of ethnic rioting, extra-judicial killings, torture, and political assassinations for the coming decades. The lack of a public transportation system for this ever-growing metropolis led to the proliferation of 'mini-buses' mostly owned and driven by Pathans. 'In 1984 and 1985, road accidents claimed two lives daily, in a city where the number of

vehicles had more than tripled in ten years'.¹⁷ The death of a young woman college student in April 1985 because of one such accident that started a riot that soon took on the ethnic hues of contention between Pathans and Biharis, a clash that continued for the next year and a half. The events of 1985 finally provided traction to the claim that only a militant defense of *Mohajirs'* claim to Karachi can provide any security to the community—a claim that was made by APMSO (All Pakistan Mohajir Student Organization) and its founder Altaf Hussain since 1978.

Mohajir identity from feminized sharif to hyper-masculine deshavgard (terrorist)

By the mid-1980s the younger generation of *Mohajirs* were ready to trade the 'shurfa' identity that implied refined manners, speaking pure Urdu, classical poetry, 'kurta-pajama' equated with passivity bordering on femininity with a virility that thrived on toting guns, engaging in urban warfare with the 'outsiders,' torturing and killing traitorous informants, and making '*bori-band lash*' (bodies in a gunny sacks) the totem of their movement. Over and over again, as I interviewed dozens of these young men in 1989 and 1990, I heard the stories about the daily humiliation faced by their families at the hand of 'rude and crude' Pathans and Punjabis who chided them as '*Bahias*' too cowardly to fight back. For these young men, Altaf Hussain and the MQM had made 'real men' out of *Mohajirs* who were now capable of terrorizing rather than being terrorized by other groups. At times, the extreme violence they engaged in had echoes in the violence of partition of Subcontinent in 1947. The idea that their elders had made a great sacrifice for Pakistan and had gained nothing fueled rage against other ethnic groups. For young men, carrying a gun transformed the stereotype of refined and thus effeminate Urdu-speaking into hyper-masculine *Mohajir*. 'There is no greater feeling than having a well-oiled, loaded Kalashnikov in your hostel room cupboard with the whole hotel knowing about it'.¹⁸ As Nichola Khan documents, 'Militancy was an all-male affair. Men, on motorbikes, foot and on the rooftops policed and demarcated community boundaries, issued threats and enforced strikes'.¹⁹ The MQM's narrative about the unjust treatment of the *Mohajirs* despite their extreme sacrifices for Pakistan provided the framework of moral outrage for these young men which was reinforced through social networks.²⁰

Along with an enhanced masculinity, becoming an MQM member provided the working and lower-middle class young men the opportunity for connection and camaraderie with other men and the ability to financially support their families. A select few of these members became 'bodyguards' 'a euphemism for diverse violent activities'.²¹ The bodyguards lived away from their families in safe houses with other militants. Over time the various neighborhoods in Karachi became marked as 'no-go' areas for outsiders. 'Knowing where to horn, turn the headlights on or flash the beam—signals used to distinguish friend from foe by neighborhood militants—would make the difference between those living through the day and those ending up in a gunny bag'.²² The bullet-ridden bodies in the gunnysack became a warning to any upstarts in the movement who may challenge the leadership of Altaf Hussain,

journalists who dared publish critical stories about MQM, and any and all political foes. Claiming their rights to Karachi through the use of force was only one side of MQM, it also put forward the image of educated middle-class technocratic leadership armed with the know-how to finally deliver 'good governance' to Karachi.

Enlightened moderation

General Musharraf who became an ally of MQM from 2002–2008 was fond of the term 'enlightened moderation' but the term also describes how the educated young supporters of Mohajir saw their movement. MQM parliamentarians and politicians highlighted their middle class status as the key to changing Pakistani politics; they often derided the 'feudal' politics of Punjab and rural Sindh and 'tribal' mentality of the Pathans and highlighted their own modernity and moderation. The image of MQM's workers as '*dashetgardh*' strewing the city streets with bullet-ridden bodies in gunny-sacks presents a jarring contrast to MQM's politicians as highly educated technocrats intent on efficiently managing the metropolis; but both of these faces are central to our understanding of strategic logic of political violence. For the past 30 years MQM had used ballots and bullets to exercise its control of Karachi. Unlike the Islamists parties, MQM has experienced consistent success at the polls even as it had to face the army operations twice in 1990s and again in 2016. In the post-9/11 world MQM highlighted its secular and progressive credentials against militant Islamic groups who were emerging as another competition for the party.²³

MQM has played coalition politics adeptly, often exercising significant influence at the national level by threatening to withdraw support from its coalition partners as a way to bargain for greater resources in Islamabad and Karachi. Twice MQM was a coalition partner of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), first in the late 1980s then again in 2008. Both times the coalition was rocky because both parties competed for control of territory and votes in Karachi and Hyderabad. MQM's coalition with PML (Nawaz) and the Musharraf government had greater stability and longevity. As Ann Frostscher points out, 'one of the fundamental features of the party is that it uses both violence and parliamentary politics to pursue and assert its interests'.²⁴

The strategic deployment of violence along with a solid vote bank that delivered predictable victories to MQM at the ballot made it a remarkably resilient force that withstood purges by the army and increasing militarization of other groups such as Lyari based PAC (People's *Aman* Committee). The PPP's plan to use PAC as its own militarized wing against MQM failed because 'localized street thugs and dependent student groups could be absorbed or controlled, but the preexisting networks of the PAC gave it the power to resist becoming a simple PPP proxy'.²⁵ The MQM was remarkably successful at keeping internal dissent at bay and centralizing power in the hands of Altaf Hussain despite the fact that he had lived in London since the early 1990s. The army in its first operation against MQM between 1992 and 1994 encouraged the formation of a splinter group MAM (*Haqiqi*).²⁶ In 2015, once again the military launched an operation against the MQM, by this time Altaf Hussain was accused of money laundering and other

crimes but what eventually ended his career as the leader of MQM was his pro-Indian rhetoric which along with his erratic behavior and increasing pressure from different factions within MQM led to the splintering of the party.

Sectarian violence in Punjab

Sectarian conflicts are the second important source of political violence in Pakistan in the last 30 years. The Deobandi Sunni extremism is responsible for thousands of Shia casualties and the Shia militant groups have retaliated by targeting the leadership and the rank and file of the Sunni groups. Roots of sectarian violence in the Punjab can be traced to two events: a 1974 constitutional amendment declaring Ahmadis non-Muslim and the passage of Zakat ordinance by General Zia in 1980. The Ahmadi community in South Asia considers itself Muslim but was declared non-Muslim in 1974 because they were accused of not affirming the creed that Muhammad is the last Prophet and of giving their founder, Ghulam Ahmed, the status of Prophet. The idea that the state can declare who is the 'right-kind' of Muslim fanned the flames of sectarianism. The militant Deobandi Sunni groups like Sipah-e-Sahaba, cited the declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslim as a precedent for declaring Shia non-Muslims in Pakistan. In a 1989 fiery address Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, the founder of the anti-Shi'a Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), demanded that he should be given a chance to appear in front of the Supreme Court to prove to them that Shia are non-Muslim, he also demanded that the 'Shia-Question' should be debated in the National Assembly just like the debate that 'proved' that Ahmadis are non-Muslim.²⁷

There had been occasional riots and sectarian conflicts between Shia and Sunni in the Indian Subcontinent for almost a century but it was the passage of the 1980 Zakat and Usher Ordinance (ZUO) that led to extreme politicization and militarization of Shia-Sunni divide. The 1980 Zakat and Ushr Ordinance (hereafter referred to as ZUO) passed by Zia-ul-Haq's government is an excellent case study in the law of 'unintended consequences' faced by the regime as it functionalized Islam to achieve legitimacy.²⁸ The Shia refused to abide by the ZUO on the grounds that they were required to fulfill this important religious obligation in ways that are not represented in the ordinance.²⁹ The cabinet record of discussion of ZUO contains several letters by prominent Shia jurists from Iran, which were presumably responding to the government of Pakistan's request to give an opinion about the implementation of Zakat. These letters offered praise to the government's attempt at Islamizing the laws and condemned the efforts to divide the Muslim *Ummah*, but all of them in the end suggested that the Shia community should be free to observe their personal laws in 'matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance, as well as their financial laws like Zakat, etc. Because otherwise, there is every likelihood that, God forbid (*sic*) if the rulers subject them to any correction or compulsion'.³⁰ The record also indicates that President Zia-ul-Haq was worried that the Saudis would be disappointed if Pakistan did not move ahead with the Zakat ordinance. A rally was organized by the Shia in 1979 to

protest against the proposed ZUO taxes in Islamabad, a place that had until then been seen as off-limits to political activities. Though there had been tensions between Shia and Sunni before this rally, it paled in comparison to what happened in Pakistan for the next three decades.

The Sunni Deobandi militancy thrived in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Though numerically they are smaller compared to their rivals, the Bareilvis, their ideological affinity with Afghan Mujahidin and later with the Taliban, provided them with the resources to take over madrassas, organize armed wings, and continue the relationship with Deobandi political party, the JUI. Anti-Shia agenda united the various Deobandi groups but the most virulent anti-Shia campaign started in Jhang district of Punjab where Haq Nawaz Jhangvi founded *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (Army of the Prophet's Companion). Haq Nawaz Jhangvi started as an Imam of a Deobandi mosque, took part in anti-Ahmadiyya campaigns and was affiliated with the JUI until he formed his own party. In his provocative speeches he laid out a case against the Shia in Pakistan. He argued that because the Shia insult and demean the companions of the Prophet they could not be considered Muslims. He frequently charged Iran with interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan and funding Shia extremism, he warned other Islamic parties not to be fooled by the rhetoric of the unity of the Islamic world; the Shia could not be trusted because they actively mislead Sunnis about their real intentions. The SSP advocated the constitutional means to declare Shia non-Muslim but a more virulent anti-Shia organization emerged in 1995, the LEJ (Lashkar-e-Jhangevi), advocating killing all those who insult the Prophet's companion, which for them meant all Shia. In response to the growing pressure on Pakistan to contain militancy General Musharraf banned several organizations including the SSP and LEJ, but it was reorganized as *Ahl-e-Sunnat-wal-Jammat* (ASWJ). Musharraf's ban did not weaken SSP/ASWJ/LEJ, instead they were able to forge closer links with Al-Qaeda and TTP (Therik-Taliban-Pakistan) and other Sunni Jihadi groups.

I want to highlight the combination of extreme violence and participation in coalitions and electoral politics exemplified by SSP/ASWJ/LEJ. The SSP started as a movement for protecting the honor of the Prophet's companions by containing or eliminating influence of Shia in Pakistan. Haq Nawz Jhangvi participated in the election and lost to a prominent Shia politician. LEJ was created as an armed militia to achieve similar aims except their pamphlet promised to kill a long list of people including: 'every person who blasphemes or insults the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Prophet Muhammad's pure wives, companions, the Qur'an, and the religion of Islam....journalist, businessman, lawyer, bureaucrat, doctor, engineer, or professor who misuses his social position to tarnish the beliefs of Muslims... every person who helps the enemies of Islam with financial, military, residential, or any other way of assistance'.³¹ In the post-9/11 environment, the LeJ 'was an orphan in need of a sponsor',³² since being compared to groups like LeT that fought Kashmir and thus earned the patronage of military regime of Musharraf the government had little use for this aggressive sectarian organization. LeJ received the much-needed patronage from Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. LeJ was highly useful for Al-Qaeda and the

Taliban in urban Punjab since they knew the language and had the social networks enabling them to find refuge and members of LeJ found refuge in FATA and Afghanistan as they escaped government 'clean-up' operations.

An important factor in the survival and longevity of militant organizations like LeJ is its ability to organize itself under a new name and register as an ordinary political party when it is banned by the state. In January 2002 LeJ was banned, it registered itself as Millat-e-Islamia Pakistan (MIP) and once MIP was banned LeJ reappeared Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamat (ASWJ). SSP/ASWJ/LeJ participation in electoral politics enables it to create a 'moderate' face of the movement. Maulana Mohammad Ahmed Ludhianvi participated in 2008 and 2013 elections, gaining substantial sums of votes though not enough to win. The ability to gain support of a slice of the electorate enabled ASWJ to bargain with mainstream political parties such as PML (Nawaz). For the 2008 elections Ludhianvi withdrew the nomination of a candidate from his party in Southern Punjab, which enabled Shahbaz Sharif to win that seat unopposed. 'In March 2010, as tensions between the PML-N and PPP simmered in Punjab, senior officials from both parties met with SSP/ASWJ leaders to secure their support for their party's respective candidate in the by-election for a Punjab Assembly seat from Jhang (PP-82)'.³³ For the 2013 elections, 'the PML-N agreed to support their candidates on four National Assembly seats from South Punjab. In return, the ASWJ promised not field its candidates against the PML-N in 12 constituencies'.³⁴

PML-N sought the cooperation of ASWJ/LeJ to spare Punjab from Jihadi violence. In 2011, one of the most notorious killers of LeJ, Malik Ishaq was released from prison. Prominent mainstream Deobandi Ulama claimed that Ishaq was a changed man, no longer interested in sectarian violence. That was a short-lived hope because Ishaq soon declared that he would continue to use violence against those who insulted the Prophet's companions. Once again we see a strategic calculation by the Punjab government to let go of Ishaq who was becoming a liability but maintain the relationship with Ludhianvi who was competing with Ishaq for leadership of the movement and was eager to win elections and become a parliamentarian. In July 2015 Ishaq and his two sons were killed in a confrontation with the police, an event that was seen as staged by the Punjab government to get rid of Ishaq. In August, the LeJ retaliated by killing Punjab's home minister in a suicide attack.

Passion for the prophet and the rise of Barelvi militancy

Barelvis are often touted as representing a moderate or 'sufi' version of Islam in South Asia. The Barelvis see practices that induce deep love for the Prophet as the central element of Islam. The effect produced by rituals such as visiting saints' tombs, marking birth and death anniversaries of the Prophet and other holy persons, singing in praise of the Prophet (*naat*), sharing food in the name of the Prophet and other holy persons—for Barelvis these constitute the heart of Islam. Though Barelvis represent a more popular version of Islam they have found themselves losing ground³⁵—literally when the rival *maslaks* took over their mosques, and figuratively

as the Deobandis and *Ahl-i-Hadith*, flush with Saudi cash, gained ever greater influence over the question of what is Islamic. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent flourishing of jihadism greatly boosted the Deobandis and *Ahl-i-Hadith*, who benefited from Saudi Arabia's patronage of their style of austere Islam. The aftermath of the Iranian revolution added further turbulence to this growing storm of sectarianism. The Deobandis and *Ahl-i-Hadith* spawned militaristic anti-Shia organizations that routinely targeted Shia places of worship, leading to counter-responses from the Shia organizations. The Barelvis have formed alliances with Shia organizations, which added fuel to their rivals' claims that they were outside the pale of mainstream Islam.

The Deobandis, Barelvis, and *Ahl-i-Hadith* have engaged in intense competition over mosques, madrassas, and shares of the increasingly religious public sphere. In the 1990s, Deobandi-inspired extremist groups seized Barelvi mosques, assassinated their leaders, and attacked their shrines. In 2006, 49 of the top Barelvi ST leaders and supporters were killed in a bomb attack at a ceremony marking the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. Mufti Sarfraz Naeemi, a Barelvi who was the first Muslim jurist in Pakistan to issue a *fatwa* against suicide bombing, was assassinated in 2009 by a member of the TTP (*Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan*). In 2010, two of the most important shrines revered by the Barelvis—Data-Darbar in Lahore and the tomb of Abdullah Shah Ghazi in Karachi—were attacked by the TTP. In response, the Barelvis vowed to eliminate the 'Talibanization' of Pakistan, and attempted to rally together under an umbrella organization, the Sunni Ittehad Council.

Salman Taseer, (1942–2011) the governor of Punjab, exuded youthful vigor thanks to his good looks and colorful personality. A close personal friend of President Zardari (2008–13), he was a favorite guest of ubiquitous news talk shows in Pakistan where he criticized his political opponents with gusto and showed no remorse for his unorthodox life style. In 2010, he made a fateful decision to champion the cause of a poor Christian woman, Aasia Bibi, who was accused of blasphemy by a group of Muslim women while they were picking berries in a village in central Punjab. Section 295/C that was used to imprison Aasia Bibi declares:

Use of derogatory remarks, etc.; in respect of the Holy Prophet. Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.

The governor visited Aasia Bibi in prison and ensured her that he would fight on her behalf. He conducted a vocal media campaign to highlight abuses of the blasphemy laws where often poor and minority communities were ensnared in court cases, long prison sentences, and sometimes even lynching by angry mobs simply because someone reported that they had seen the accused burning pages of the Qur'an or making derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad. It was the first time since the Blasphemy Ordinance had been introduced in 1986 that a prominent politician had

taken a clear stance against well-documented abuses of the law. His stance created a firestorm of controversy prompting many Islamists to accuse the Governor of being '*Gustagh-e-Rasool*' (impudent to the Prophet) and thus '*wajib-ul-qatal*' (deserving of death). The Islamists also warned that they would not tolerate any mercy shown to Aasia Bibi and would oppose any modification to the blasphemy law which they argued would be akin to challenging God's law.

Despite being the governor of the largest province of Pakistan and a close personal friend of the president, Salman Taseer was left to fend for himself by the Pakistan People's Party as the controversy gathered force. Sherry Rahman was the only prominent member of the governing party that took a public stance, introducing a Private Member Bill to modify the blasphemy law in the parliament. As the voices calling for the death of Salman Taseer grew shrill he defended himself by insisting that as a Muslim he could not imagine insulting the Prophet and that he was criticizing a man-made law. But despite the growing threat against his life and political career, Salman Taseer refused to back down and in a poignant last tweet³⁶ before he was brutally gunned down in January, 2011, he tweeted an Urdu couplet by Shakeel Badayuni: 'My determination is so strong that I am not afraid of external flames. But I do fear the fire simmering inside the flower. It is this fire that can burn down the garden'.³⁷ The assassin who emptied 26 bullets into Salman Taseer's body was his own bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri.

For Barelvis, the blasphemy statutes, particularly 295-C, provide a coming together of law and passion for the Prophet in ways that they find politically advantageous. All of the Islamic groups support keeping blasphemy statutes, and many non-Barelvis had used Salman Taseer's support of Aasia Bibi to organize rallies and rail against liberal Muslims and the infidel West. The Barelvis, however, have made the protection of 295-C the center of their politics. Mumtaz Qadri's affiliation with the Barelvis was taken on by ambitious leaders like Hanif Qureshi as a providential help in their struggle to claim political power and to vanquish rival *maslaks*. After three years of bitter debate over the guilt or innocence of Mumtaz Qadri, the state executed him on February 29, 2016. Qadri had been affiliated with the Barelvi movement, and it was the political wing of the Barelvis, *Sunni-Tehrik* (ST) and *Shabab-e-Islami* (SI), who took custody of his body and planned his funeral, which attracted a large crowd. The funeral provided an occasion for the Barelvis to flex their political muscles against the government, but even more importantly against the Deobandis and Ahl-i-Hadith. The social media wings of the ST and SI prepared dozens of videos showing the enormous crowds at the funeral and the Facebook pages of ST and SI were full of exhortations by the younger devotees of Mufti Hanif Qureshi to take advantage of the unexpected turnout at Qadri's funeral with a Long March on Islamabad to demonstrate the political power of 'lovers of the Prophet' (*Ashaq-e-Rasool*).

The younger members of Sunni Tehrik (ST), an offshoot of the Barelvi movement, were eager to claim their share of the political space in Pakistan and the much greater than expected turnout for Mumtaz Qadri's funeral was seized by them to storm Islamabad and flex their political muscles. That first 'dharna' or takeover of the capital was a failure, the government ignored the sit-in but circumstances changed in 2016 for

ST. The PML(N) government was under pressure due to the revelation of corruption in the Panama papers, the military and intelligence agencies were interested in either getting rid of the government or making it a lame-duck administration with little chance of winning the next elections. The ST's decision to launch a sit-in in a central artery connecting the Capital to Rawalpindi ostensibly to protest the supposed deletion of words affirming Prophet Muhammad as the final Prophet from the oath taken by parliamentarians gained more traction because of the changes in the strategic environment. The civilian government was weakened and reluctant to use force against protestors because of its fear that any killing would provide further momentum to the movement in the shape of 'martyrs' (*shaeed*). The ST was not shy about using violence, it attacked houses of PML(N) members, beat up the police, and aggressively blockaded central arteries of the capital. Unlike the 2015 sit-in the government was eager to negotiate with ST. The *dharna* ended when the army facilitated the negotiation and the government accepted most of the demands of ST. The leadership of ST, now emboldened, decided to maintain the momentum through electioneering, protest, and even the Gandhian tactic of offering itself for voluntary arrests.



FIGURE 10.1 A 2018 election poster of Labayik Ya Rasool Allah, with the message: stand by with Labayik Ya Rasool Allah to ensure the rule of the 'Deen' of Prophet Muhammad

Source: Photo courtesy of Farhat Haq, January 2018.

Conclusion

In the examples of MQM in Karachi, Deobandi Sunni extremism, and the growing militancy of Barelvis we see a template shaping politics in Pakistan. Rather than normal politicking and the use of violence as two opposing tactics, armed militias, organized criminal groups, militant groups, and mainstream political parties cooperate and compete with each other. Violence becomes the pursuit of political goals through other means. Maintaining linkages with armed militia enabled MQM to challenge ethnic stereotypes of *Mohajir* as too timid to fight and it allowed the party to exercise total control over several neighborhoods of Karachi. MQM adeptly used the ghastly symbol of '*bori-band lash*' along with enlightened moderation of their urban, educated leadership to exercise control over much of Karachi and jostle for greater share of political space at the center. The desire for *qabza* over the interpretation of religious dogma as well as mosques, neighborhoods, and the electorate led Deobandi organizations to strategically deploy ballots and bullets. The fact that the Barelvis' Sunni Tehrik and LYRA is using the passion for the Prophet to become a militant organization shows how deeply violence has taken root in politics in Pakistan.

Notes

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11

ISLAND OF VIOLENCE

Sinhalese Buddhist majoritarianism and ethno-religious conflict in Sri Lanka

Neil DeVotta

Since achieving independence peacefully 70 years ago, Sri Lanka has experienced variegated violence every generation—in the form of ethno-religious riots, insurgencies, and civil war. If the 1950s saw two major anti-Tamil riots (followed by more anti-Tamil rioting in the late 1970s and early 1980s) that pushed the country towards an ethnic conflict that lasted nearly three decades, the early 1970s and late 1980s saw brutal left-wing insurgencies designed to topple governments.¹ Most assumed that the end of the ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils in May 2009, which killed over 100,000 people, augured peace; yet soon thereafter anti-Muslim agitation and propaganda led to periodic violence against Sri Lanka's other minority community. How does one explain such persistent and widespread violence given the island's supposedly peaceful Buddhist credentials?

Understanding Sri Lanka's post-independence violence requires one to distinguish between the peaceful precepts of Buddhism and the baleful consequences of political Buddhism and appreciate the manner in which political elites have manipulated the latter. In short, while the Buddhist religion emphasizes values rooted in nonviolence, political Buddhism disregards Buddhist values when seeking to restructure society based on a constructed mytho-historical past. While directly influenced by the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology, which claims Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhalese Buddhists and minorities live on the island thanks to the majority community's sufferance. Other issues that promote political Buddhism include the colonial authorities' attempts to undermine Buddhism, Buddhists being a minority in South Asia and the world, concerns stemming from the spread of secular values at the expense of traditional values, Tamil separatism and attacks by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on monks and Buddhist treasures/symbols, and opportunistic and decadent monks that compromise the sangha (Buddhist community). This noted, the fact is that political Buddhism allows the Buddhist religion to get manipulated as a means to an end, causing its basic tenets

to be compromised and discredited. Indeed, Buddhist laymen and clergy in Sri Lanka have used each other to mutual benefit by propagating political Buddhism.² The monks have ensured prominence, influence, and subventions while providing politicians a platform to prove their Sinhalese Buddhist credentials and loyalty to an ethnocentric state ideal—even by using Buddhism as an instrument of violence.³

Consequently, this chapter argues that while multiple issues coalesce to generate ethno-religious tensions in Sri Lanka, the ensuing violence is best understood when political and economic grievances and preferences get analyzed within the prism of Sinhalese Buddhist majoritarianism. In doing so, this chapter is divided into three main sections. The first documents the ethno-political context that has allowed the consolidation of Sinhalese Buddhist majoritarianism; the second deals with Sinhalese-Tamil violence and the civil war; while the third section focuses on the post-civil war anti-Muslim violence that Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists have spearheaded. The conclusion claims that given present ethno-political dynamics Sri Lanka is slated to experience more violence, with the Muslim community positioned to be the main victims.

Ethno-political context

With a population approximating 21 million, Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Ethnically the Sinhalese comprise 74.9% of the population, while Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils, and Muslims are 11.2%, 4.1%, and 9.3%, respectively.⁴ In terms of religion, Buddhists are 70.1%, while Hindus, Christians, and Muslims are 12.6%, 7.6%, and 9.7%, respectively.⁵ Most Sinhalese are Buddhist, while most Tamils are Hindu. Sinhalese, Tamils, and Burghers (the latter a diminishing Eurasian demographic) constitute Christians, with Catholics among them being around 6.2% of the country's population. Muslims mainly speak the Tamil language, although most Muslims under 40 now also speak Sinhala. The Muslims, however, use Islam as their primary identity as doing so effectively differentiates them from the Tamil communities.⁶

The Sinhalese Buddhist belief about being 'sons of the soil' is based on a mytho-historical text called the *Mahavamsa* (or Great Chronicle), which claims to document the country's origins beginning in 543 BCE, although scholars believe the book was first put together by Buddhist monks around the sixth century AD. As per the *Mahavamsa*, the Sinhalese originate from the area around today's West Bengal/ Bangladesh and Lord Buddha chose them to live in Sri Lanka and protect his dhamma (teachings). This is the basis for Sinhalese Buddhists branding Sri Lanka *sihadipa* (island of the Sinhalese) and *dhammadipa* (island chosen to preserve and propagate Buddhism). The majoritarian mindset such mytho-history facilitated was embedded by the time the island achieved independence in February 1948. This was partly due to British attempts to divide and rule the island, which empowered Burghers and minority Tamils within especially the civil service and armed forces at the expense of majority Sinhalese, and related tensions that had developed between ethnic groups—tensions that led to Sinhalese and Muslim rioting in 1915 and disagreements between Sinhalese and Tamils over representation in the country's burgeoning electoral space.

Sri Lanka is Asia's oldest democracy in that it was the region's first country to be afforded universal franchise in 1931. The relatively better living standards when compared to the rest of South Asia, camaraderie among multi-ethnic elites, and the lack of a tempestuous independence movements (similar to that taking place in neighboring India at the time) contributed to the British considering the island a model colony. But this in turn led them to disregard instituting meaningful minority guarantees before granting independence. Some Tamils especially clamored for such guarantees, but their faith and confidence in D. S. Senanayake, the country's first prime minister, was such that they too agreed with the Soulbury Constitution that the British crafted before departing. Constitutions represent a country's foremost institution because they are codified and, over time, the rights and structure they provide get appreciated and embedded. With the Soulbury Constitution not providing any ironclad minority guarantees, opportunistic politicians soon began manipulating the island's demographics to attain power. With Sinhalese Buddhists being a dominant majority, democracy's one person, one vote principle allowed these politicians to marginalize especially Tamils and consolidate majoritarianism. With Tamils themselves divided along caste, regional, and party lines and Muslims and Tamils not allied, Sinhalese Buddhist elites were easily able to divide the minorities even as they themselves pursued a policy of ethnic outbidding, which led the country's two main parties trying to outdo each other on who could provide the best deal for the majority community.⁷

The first minority group to be sidelined were the Indian Tamils—also called Hill Country Tamils, Up Country Tamils, or Estate Tamils since most continue to work on plantations—when the community was denied citizenship within a year of independence. Caste conscious Sri Lankan Tamils who had long looked down on these once indentured laborers went along with this disenfranchisement. So did local and British businessmen who feared that these Tamil laborers would strengthen the island's leftist parties that were quite popular in the years leading to independence. The decision to disenfranchise these so-called 'Indian Tamils' preceded heated discussions between Indian leaders and Sinhalese politicians, and these discussions made clear the degree to which Sinhalese Buddhist ethnocentrism was motivating the island's position towards minorities, in this instance against many long-standing residents who had contributed much to the economy.⁸ It was not until the 1990s that all Indian Tamils were provided citizenship, but thanks mainly to forced repatriation to India in the 1960s and 1970s, the Indian Tamil population that comprised 11.73% in 1946 was down to 4.1% in 2012.⁹ Their successful disenfranchisement created a precedent that emboldened Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists who next went after the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Despite being a numerical minority, Sri Lankan Tamils were disproportionately represented within the civil service, armed forces, universities, and professional services and thus operated as a dominant community.¹⁰ Empowering Sinhalese meant disempowering especially those Tamils whose elites had collaborated with Sinhalese colleagues to negotiate independence. And the mechanism that came in handy when doing so was language. English continued to operate as the only official language following independence, which meant that permits, licenses, petitions, telegrams, police

complaints, and court proceedings were handled in a language 90% did not fully comprehend. This untenable situation led to a movement to make Sinhala and Tamil official languages instead of English. But Sinhalese rightly realized that a milieu where Sinhala alone was the national language would empower their community, and this led to the Sinhala Only Movement. It was a movement that quickly poisoned relations between Sinhalese and Tamils and led to unimaginable violence. Indeed, just 10 years following independence the island's ethno-political climate had deteriorated to the point where one Tamil parliamentarian bemoaned that 'people who have never been communalists have become communalists and those who have been moderates have become extremists while extremists have become incorrigible fanatics'.¹¹ The fanaticism would affect both communities, leading to ethnic riots and one of the most grotesque civil wars.

Sinhalese-Tamil violence

The century leading to Sri Lanka's independence saw riots between Sinhalese Buddhists and Sinhalese Catholics (during the 1883 Kotahena religious riots) and Sinhalese-Muslim violence (in 1915). Following the latter riots, certain leading Tamil politicians defended Sinhalese political leaders the British had imprisoned over the violence. These same leaders, on the Sinhalese and Tamil sides, were among those who came together to negotiate independence. The peaceful and orderly transfer of power and the camaraderie between Sinhalese and Tamil elites were reasons to believe Sri Lanka 'had the best chance of making a successful transition to modern statehood'¹² and could thereby be an exemplar for states undergoing decolonization. Yet within eight years of this momentous event, Sinhalese set upon Tamils in the island's first ever anti-Tamil riots. The proximate cause of the 1956 Sinhalese-Tamil violence was the movement to make Sinhala the island's official language. Initially, the plan was to make both Sinhala and Tamil official languages. But the clamor within the Sinhalese lower classes to make Sinhala the only official language eventually drew support, with SWRD Bandaranaike using the issue to catapult himself to the premiership.

Bandaranaike was a member of the United National Party (UNP), which negotiated independence from the British, but left the outfit and formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) after he realized the UNP's leader and country's first Prime Minister, D. S. Senanayake, was grooming his son to succeed him. The Sinhala Only movement provided Bandaranaike the opportunity to embrace a popular issue and thereby distinguish himself and his party from the UNP. Tamil protests against the Sinhala Only Act was what led to the 1956 anti-Tamil riots, which killed around 150 Tamils.¹³ The Sinhala Only movement was influenced by Sinhalese, who numbered nearly 70% of the population at the time and felt that on principle it was only proper for the majority community's language to be made the country's main language. Others linked language to socioeconomic upward mobility, and the Tamils realized Sinhala as the only official language was bound to affect their economic status negatively. But undergirding these preferences was the

Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology, which the Sinhalese revival that formed in the mid-19th century facilitated.¹⁴ For instance, the 1956 election that led to Bandaranaike becoming prime minister coincided with the Buddha Jayanthi, the 2,500th anniversary of Buddha's death. This anniversary allowed the proponents of the Sinhala Only Act to emphasize *sihadipa* and *dhammadipa* and thereby link the Buddhist religion to their ethno-linguistic demand.

The 1956 election and the subsequent passage of the Sinhala Only Act were seminal events in that they heralded the dominance of Sinhalese Buddhists in the island's politics. Indeed, for some Buddhist nationalists the island achieved true independence in 1956, not 1948. But 1956 also was the year that sundered Sinhalese-Tamil comity. The riots not only caused the Tamils to feel that they had been betrayed, they also began to weaken the position of Tamil moderates. Two years later, when Bandaranaike's government sent buses into the predominantly Tamil north with the Sinhala letter 'sri' imprinted on their number plates, Tamil protests led to additional rioting. These 1958 riots were more intense than the riots of 1956. Tamil politicians claimed that at least 2,000 Tamils were killed; it, however, is more likely that around 300 to 400 Tamils lost their lives.¹⁵

A Buddhist monk assassinated Bandaranaike in 1959 and his wife, Sirimavo, succeeded him as the SLFP's prime minister—ruling from 1960–65 and 1970–77 during which time she and her party introduced a number of anti-Tamil policies that helped pave the way for Tamil separatism. Mrs Bandaranaike ensured that Sinhala Only was instituted into the courts system even in the northeast, where the vast majority of Tamils spoke and understood no Sinhala; Tamil civil servants were forced to learn Sinhala to be promoted; few Tamils were hired into government service in subsequent years; Sinhalese civil servants who spoke no Tamil were stationed in Tamil areas as a way of ensuring linguistic hegemony; quotas were introduced to increase the number of rural Sinhalese students in the university system (which also negatively impacted urban Sinhalese, although the main target were Tamils); Tamil students were required to score higher to enter the universities (with some in government making the dubious claim that Tamils scored high on exams only because Tamil examiners inflated grades); the government avoided developing Tamil areas (in especially irrigation) even when aid was earmarked for these areas, and in some instances used the aid to develop Sinhalese areas; the government aggressively pursued ethnic flooding of the Eastern Province by sponsoring Sinhalese colonization; and Tamil literature and entertainment entering the island from neighboring Tamil Nadu were banned or controlled. Additionally, in 1961 the military was stationed in the Northern Province in response to peaceful Tamil protests and the army soon came to be seen as an occupation force. Indeed, much of this was taking place even as some Sinhalese bureaucrats sought to set up military camps that surrounded the Northern Province so as to keep Tamils subdued.¹⁶

One other controversial policy that Mrs Bandaranaike pursued was the takeover of mainly Catholic private schools because the influence these institutions and their usually Anglophone alumni commanded were believed to stymie Sinhalese Buddhist upward mobility. Indeed, many of the educational reforms that were pursued

since the Sinhala Only Act was passed was geared to create a bureaucracy and state structure that ensured Sinhala Buddhist domination in line with the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology. For instance, in 1972 the second Sirimavo Bandaranaike government instituted, without any input whatsoever from Tamils, what was widely considered the country's first autochthonous constitution, which incorporated Sinhala as the official language, branded the island a unitary state, and also gave Buddhism foremost status. This was another act of exclusion in that the government not only utterly disregarded minority opinions, it superimposed a majoritarian constitution on minorities. If Sri Lanka's prospects of becoming a liberal democracy had once been good, the policies that especially Mrs Bandaranaike instituted made it a full-fledged ethnocracy.¹⁷ This was why even some mainstream Tamil leaders in the mid-1970s joined with many youth and called for a separate Tamil state (eelam).¹⁸

It is important to recognize here that these anti-minority policies were geared to economically privilege Sinhalese Buddhists. While the UNP government that came to power in 1977 made Tamil an official language as well, the party, rather than try and accommodate Tamils' legitimate grievances, sought to use the Tamil issue to expand its political prospects. By then Tamil rebels were robbing banks in the Northern Province and attacking police personnel, and some within the UNP retaliated by helping to orchestrate these anti-Tamil riots. The party's goons were also responsible for torching the famous Jaffna Library, which housed thousands of rare Tamil documents and symbolized Tamil culture and learning. The UNP also instigated violence against those who opposed the government, with party thugs beating up protesters and striking workers.¹⁹ Such party-sponsored hooliganism was a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka and contributed to the gradual erosion of democracy that the pro-Sinhalese Buddhist ethnocracy had spawned.

But the party's culpability in these instances was nothing compared to the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom, which ensued after the LTTE ambushed and killed 13 army soldiers. The carnage took place in two phases and likely killed around 2,000 Tamils.²⁰ It was the worst ever violence between ethnic communities in Sri Lanka. The second Sirimavo Bandaranaike government (1970–77) pursued economic policies rooted in autarky and dirigisme, which allowed Sinhalese Buddhist entrepreneurs to monopolize certain industries. The J. R. Jayewardene government defenestrated these policies and adopted a structural adjustment program that led to the free flow of foreign-made goods, which in turn put these monopolists out of business. Tamil retailers and wholesalers, partly due to their connections to South Indian businesses, benefitted immensely from the new economic regime. The 1983 pogrom was a golden opportunity to retaliate against the prospering Tamil business classes.²¹ It is no accident that Tamil businesses were especially targeted during the ensuing rioting. It was a classic instance of economic preferences and ethnocentric politicking feeding off each other.

The 1983 pogrom led to thousands of Tamils fleeing abroad and to villages in the north. The armed forces' complicity and government's unwillingness to use force to immediately halt the riots led even moderate Tamils to believe that their community

would be better off as a separate country. Overnight, pro-eelam (the term for a separate Tamil state) rebel groups that numbered in the dozens became hundreds and thousands strong. And soon those who fled abroad formed a potent diaspora to support one of Asia's longest and savage civil wars.

The Tamils' failed quest for Eelam

While some Tamil rebel organizations bent on secession were operating when the 1983 riots took place, the number thereafter may have been as high as 40 groups. These entities fought the government as much as they did each other. The speed with which they and the security forces resorted to tit-for-tat violence stunned both Sinhalese and Tamil societies even as it strengthened extremists on both sides. Over time, the LTTE, considered the most disciplined and ruthless, coopted or wiped out the other rebel organizations and claimed to be the sole representative for the Tamils.²²

By any measure, the LTTE was among the most formidable rebel groups ever. In addition to attracting thousands of cadres, the group also set up an international apparatus using the Tamil diaspora that operated like a multinational corporation. In addition to global propaganda and lobbying offices, the LTTE set up procurement channels that ensured its cadre were supplied with a steady stream of weapons. A group that comprised less than five dozen cadre when it ambushed the army convoy that led to the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom and civil war, it soon numbered in the thousands and went from being a guerrilla outfit to a conventional army. Its leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran was as feared as he was revered, and he is credited with the group's single minded focus on securing eelam. At its height, the LTTE comprised a naval outfit, police force, rudimentary air force, sophisticated intelligence unit, and a suicide bomber squad. The latter killed numerous army personnel, Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and hundreds of innocent Sinhalese and Tamil civilians. Gandhi, when he was prime minister, had dispatched to Sri Lanka's northeast the Indian Peace Keeping Force, which ended up fighting the LTTE in India's longest war. The fear that Gandhi would once more target the organization should he become prime minister again was a major reason for the LTTE assassinating him. Doing so, however, was one of the biggest blunders the organization made, as it ensured the LTTE could thereafter never count on especially a Congress Party-led government in India to support it in any fashion.

The LTTE proved rather adept at creating institutions in the territories the group controlled, so as to signal its ability to eventually run an independent state.²³ But Prabhakaran and the organization brooked no dissent, made clear they did not believe in multiparty democracy, and operated in fascistic fashion.²⁴ As *The Economist* aptly noted 'the Tigers were as vicious and totalitarian a bunch of thugs as ever adopted terrorism as a national liberation struggle'.²⁵ Ultimately, the LTTE's modus operandi turned out to be the group's undoing. In addition to using suicide cadres, the LTTE forcibly recruited children, cavalierly assassinated rivals, and resorted to forced taxation and extortion within and outside its territories. The extortion extended to Tamils living abroad, and the group was most likely

responsible for killing more Tamils (until the Mahinda Rajapaksa government resorted to the mass murder of Tamils during the final stages of the war). All this led numerous countries, including India, the United States, Canada, Australia, and those in the European Union, to proscribe the group. While it does take some effort on the part of governments to get groups branded terrorist and proscribed, once designated as such it becomes exceedingly hard for such groups to get de-proscribed. Thus Tamil eelam suffered a mortal blow when over 30 countries banned the LTTE. But Prabhakaran's determination to secure a separate state militarily, as opposed to negotiating a compromise that may have eventually led to meaningful Tamil autonomy, was also a factor in the Tamils' failed quest for eelam.

Many within and outside Sri Lanka believed there was no military solution to the ethnic conflict and only a political solution, through which the predominantly Tamil northeast was provided meaningful devolution, was the best way to resolve the civil war. What all these naysayers failed to recognize was the extent to which the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime was willing to resort to terrorism to defeat terrorism. The nationalist Rajapaksa government came to power in November 2005 by adopting a hardline stance against the LTTE. With the rebels having used previous rounds of peace talks to rearm, regroup, and continue their quest for eelam and Prabhakaran being unwilling to settle for anything short of a separate state, the new government was convinced that defeating the LTTE militarily was the only way to end the war. Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists too had consistently opposed any compromise with the LTTE and clamored for a military solution to the conflict, so the Rajapaksa position was in line with their preferences.

The government resorted to various strategies to ensure the military's momentum. It used the state-owned press to underreport military casualties and inflate LTTE deaths, thereby preserving military morale and public support for the war. It kept increasing troop strength to hold on to territory captured from the LTTE, thus preventing the LTTE from shifting its operations into cleared areas (a tactic that had worked well for the rebels in the past). It adopted a no-holds-barred policy against journalists who reported on military setbacks, branding them traitors and resorting to intimidation, beatings, and murder to muzzle them. Consequently, over a dozen journalists were killed between 2006 and 2009 and nearly 30 fled the country.²⁶ It also used anti-LTTE Tamil paramilitaries and military death squads to eliminate anyone suspected of LTTE ties. Furthermore, it continuously bombed LTTE areas without regard to civilian casualties. Indeed, the military was accused of deliberately targeting civilian areas, including hospitals.²⁷ The LTTE had long sought to ensure control over a certain amount of territory and the Tamil population living within it even while fighting to obtain eelam. The former allowed the group to maintain a conventional war capability, while the latter enabled recruitment (voluntary and coerced), taxation, extortion, and maintaining the trappings of a state. The civilians also ended up becoming human shields,²⁸ which suited the LTTE, especially if the civilian presence deterred military operations. But with the Rajapaksa government exhibiting no qualms about bombing civilian areas, the LTTE was unable to protect its civilian base even as it exploited civilians.

According to United Nations' estimates, the Sri Lankan military may have killed nearly 40,000 Tamil civilians during the last nine months of the war.²⁹ While the Sri Lankan government disputes this figure, the civil war certainly killed over 100,000 Sinhalese and Tamils (including military personnel and LTTE cadre). According to Rayappu Joseph, the former Catholic Bishop of Mannar, as many as 147,000 Tamils are unaccounted for in the northeast.³⁰ This could mean that the overall death rates from the civil war are considerably higher than commonly thought. Pro-LTTE advocates have especially sought to argue that what took place in Sri Lanka was genocide. While the violence perpetrated against Tamils in certain areas, especially during the latter stages of the war, fits certain clauses of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the government ultimately took in and released over 300,000 Tamils who were forced to march with the LTTE and also rehabilitated and released over 10,000 LTTE cadres. There is no gainsaying that many among them were abused,³¹ yet one must acknowledge that a government bent on genocide (as seen in the Holocaust and Rwanda) would not have accommodated these Tamils. That noted, there appears to have been a calibrated attempt on the part of certain government operatives to diminish the Tamil population. This culling squares with nationalists' obsession over demographics, and some have used the term 'rolling genocide' to refer to such violence designed to control, subjugate, and weaken minorities over an extended period so as to make the group irrelevant eventually.³² This mindset also appears to pervade the most hardcore Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists now targeting the island's Muslims.

Anti-Muslim violence

As noted above, Sri Lanka's Muslims currently constitute around 10% of the island's population. The community's staunch opposition to the LTTE's quest for separatism led to some Sinhalese branding it the 'good minority'.³³ The anti-Muslim narrative that took root in mid-2012 and led to some Muslim businesses, homes, and mosques being attacked therefore stunned the community.³⁴ But in hindsight, the anti-Muslim violence that has panned out is a logical extension of the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist project and was predictable.³⁵ For if the Muslims were branded the 'good minority' vis-à-vis the secessionist LTTE/Tamils, the sentiment was juxtaposed with a strong current of anti-Muslim opinion. Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists exploit this sentiment to marginalize and dominate Muslims (and also certain Christians) by combining anti-Muslim stereotypes with Sinhalese Buddhist leitmotifs. As noted above, the first inter-religious riots in Sri Lanka were in 1915 between Sinhalese and Muslims.

The riots led to at least 25 Muslims being killed, over 4,000 shops looted and burned, and over 100 mosques destroyed; this in addition to 63 mainly Sinhalese rioters killed by the military and another 34 subsequently executed following trial.³⁶ Business rivalries and land issues especially led to episodic, localized scuffles between Sinhalese and Muslims thereafter,³⁷ even as certain Sinhalese elites kept

excoriating Muslims. For instance, in 1948 (the year the island gained independence) one writer referred to Muslims as ‘barbarians’ in comparison to the Sinhalese.³⁸ Such sentiments were no doubt influenced by the tensions the 1915 riots fanned, but they reinforced stereotypes about Muslims that the likes of the prominent Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala had popularized. Dharmapala, who vilified all ethno-religious minorities, seemed to loathe Muslims, whom he claimed were ‘alien people ... [who] by Shylockian methods became prosperous like the Jews’.³⁹

Muslims have since had to tolerate and negotiate such stereotypes. For even during the civil war, when Muslims were supporting the government side, it was common to hear individuals say that while Sinhalese Buddhists could live with Tamils, given their common civilizational connections, coexisting with Muslims was bound to be difficult given the community’s insularity, unwillingness to assimilate, and apparent loyalty to predominantly Muslim countries over Sri Lanka.⁴⁰ Compounding the anti-Muslim sentiment were claims that Muslims typically fleeced non-Muslims (and mainly Sinhalese) when trading with them and that their higher fertility rates and increased piety were undermining the island’s Sinhalese Buddhist character. In the past few years a radical group called the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force, or BBS) has been at the forefront in exploiting such sentiments.

The BBS was formed in July 2012 and from its inception embraced anti-Muslim (and also anti-Christian, albeit mainly anti-evangelical) rhetoric. The group’s immediate predecessor was the Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Sinhala Heritage Party, or JHU), which was created in February 2004 and influenced by the death of a telegenic monk named Gangodavila Soma.⁴¹ Soma embraced anti-Muslim, anti-Christian, and anti-Western platforms as he craftily sought to position himself to contest the presidency, but he died while on a trip to Russia in December 2003.⁴² Given that the monks who were instrumental in organizing the BBS were initially part of the JHU, it is no surprise that they have taken some of Soma’s anti-Muslim positions to new heights. The BBS, which has proved adept at adopting Islamophobic rhetoric akin to India’s Hindutva forces and Burma’s 969 Movement, initially gained prominence by campaigning against halal (permissible under Islamic law) products being marketed. Sri Lankans of all ethnicities have long purchased halal products, which also constitute an important source of export to especially Middle Eastern markets. With a clerical entity called the All Ceylon Jammiyatul Ulama responsible for certifying halal status for a minor fee, campaigning against such products not only targeted that particular institution but also symbolically victimized the entire Muslim community.

The BBS was instrumental in facilitating the worst recent attack against Muslims, which took place in June 2014 in Aluthgama, a town around 40 miles south of Colombo, and its nearby Muslim enclave called Dharga Town. The spark that led to the riots was an altercation between a Buddhist monk’s driver and some Muslim men—after an argument ensued about the monk’s vehicle having difficulty bypassing an auto rickshaw along Dharga Town’s narrow streets.⁴³ But Sinhala-

Muslim tensions had been running high by then thanks to claims that a Sinhalese boy was raped in a Muslim-owned shop and mainly due to the BBS-fanned anti-Muslim agitprop, which especially affected locales where Sinhalese and Muslims interacted. A BBS rally soon after the altercation with the monk's driver led to a Sinhalese Buddhist protest march, which some Muslims supposedly attacked with stones. Muslim leaders in Dharga Town claim no Muslim was stupid enough to do such a thing when tensions were running so high and when the community lived in fear of being attacked.⁴⁴

The riots that took place appear to have been calibrated, with residents claiming that paramilitary personnel who had been stationed to supposedly prevent violence were among those who used live ammunition and torched houses and vehicles. Many residents consistently said that the paramilitary forces appeared determined to control their movements even as they allowed the rioters free movement. A number noted how high-powered flash lights were projected into Muslim areas to assist the rioters and these Muslim residents questioned how a supposedly spontaneous mob could possess such equipment. The scale of the violence was such that the Muslim residents in Dharga Town were surprised to learn that while 88 people had suffered injuries, only three persons had been killed. This is because the rioters were mainly interested in looting and destroying Muslim property. According to a document put together by the Muslim community in the area, one mosque was fully damaged and another mosque partially damaged; 48 houses were completely destroyed, 60 homes were partially damaged, and 66 homes saw minor damages (such as windows broken and minor burning); 39 shops were completely destroyed while 40 shops were partially damaged; and 37 motorbikes and auto rickshaws and 15 other vehicles were destroyed. The total damage to property was estimated to be 2.5 billion Rupees (approximately \$19,188,000).⁴⁵ As noted above, Sri Lanka's first anti-Muslim riots took place in 1915. Many feared that the BBS and other Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists were preparing to mark its centennial with a pogrom and that the attack on Dharga Town was a dry run.

The BBS retreated after President Mahinda Rajapaksa lost the presidential election that was held in January 2015,⁴⁶ but some of its monks have recently made clear that they intend to revive their anti-Muslim agenda. Indeed, one leading BBS monk recently claimed they could 'end the rise of the Muslims' if politicians backed them.⁴⁷ The BBS's renewed attempts to target Muslims appears related to Rajapaksa's determination to continue to play a dominant role in the island's politics. The fact is that given dormant anti-Muslim sentiment in the country, the BBS and its ilk could easily revive their agenda amidst massive violence. As noted above, the grotesque 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom that sparked the civil war was partly influenced by Sinhalese petit bourgeoisie traders who felt they were losing out to Tamil businessmen. Many among their class now believe they are similarly challenged by Muslim traders and would not mind seeing their competition violently diminished. The BBS appeals to this group, 'given its ability to articulate threats to Buddhism in the language and framework of global market capitalism'.⁴⁸

Muslims engage in all sorts of enterprises, including farming, but in urban areas especially they appear predominantly to be involved as traders and small business owners. Part of this has to do with the community's origins in Sri Lanka, with Muslims coming to the island almost 1,000 years ago to trade; and part of it due to the fact that neither the British nor post-independence governments sought to accommodate Muslims in the island's bureaucracy. Consequently, the community has had little choice but to tap into its trading acumen and leverage business networks to pursue livelihoods. While the insular nature of the community when even doing business is a legitimate criticism, the same could be said regarding Sinhalese businesspersons from the south who tend to prefer to deal with each other even when they have set up businesses in Colombo. But the sense that Muslims are prospering by trading unfairly with Sinhalese and that they are getting ahead economically (and demographically) have all combined to influence anti-Muslim sentiment.

Conclusion

The saying 'violence begets violence' is more than a cliché when applied to multiethnic societies, because such violence inures communities and conditions societal relations as people take sides between their 'nation' and others. From an institutional standpoint, what ethnic and communal violence does over time is allow perpetrators to operate with impunity and vitiate the rule of law. The rioters who freely attacked Tamils eventually gave license to those who killed Tamils, who in turn as part of the LTTE and other separatist rebels felt justified murdering anyone associated with the Sri Lankan state. Inevitably, the violence the island has experienced has also hurt democracy. With ethno-religious identity forming the basis for the policies that influenced violence in Sri Lanka, the country that was a commendable democracy soon turned into an ethnocracy. Within a generation the entire institutional apparatus began politically and economically privileging Sinhalese Buddhists without regard to competence and merit. The degradation in the quality of parliamentarians and bureaucrats prove this point. It is no accident that today over 98% of Sri Lanka's military are Sinhalese, or that over 92% of the country's bureaucrats are Sinhalese.⁴⁹ And today not only is Sinhalese Buddhist dominance openly asserted, any change that appears to question this dominance is vociferously challenged by politicians and Buddhist monks. In short, *sihadipa* and *dhammadipa* are now institutionalized, which also means that while the island may revel as an electoral democracy, it is unlikely to operate as a liberal democracy.

Could Sri Lanka have avoided the ethno-religious violence it has endured since independence? It is possible that a constitutional structure that forced cooperation among ethnic communities may have tamed majoritarianism even as it provided the Sinhalese Buddhists a relatively privileged position. Institutional structures can always be tampered with, and a formulation that recognized Sri Lanka's unique Buddhist heritage yet accommodated minority aspirations amidst ethnic egalitarianism, could well have prevented the carnage that ensued. But that did not happen, and what has consequently ensued has emboldened Sinhalese Buddhist

nationalists who now seem determined to persecute all minorities, especially the country's Muslims. Sri Lankans have paid a heavy price for their politicians' ethnic malpractice. They should ensure that their leaders do not repeat the mistakes made with the Tamils when dealing with the Muslims. This is especially important given the extent to which Islamist extremism has taken root in South Asia. There are already rumors that some Sri Lankan Muslims may have joined ISIS for various reasons. But state-sponsored anti-Muslim violence will inevitably radicalize hitherto peaceable Muslims, which could very well bring the likes of ISIS to the country's shores. Such radicalization cannot be compartmentalized within the island and will instead get diffused regionally. It is therefore imperative that national, regional, and international actors work collectively to encourage political contestation devoid of ethno-religious machinations. But given the degree to which Sinhalese Buddhist extremists are currently empowered and emboldened, and also the extent to which many among the Sinhalese have come to loathe Muslims, Sinhalese-Muslim carnage is unfortunately in the offing.

Notes

- 1 This chapter deals with ethno-political violence and therefor does not analyze the two insurgencies (in 1971 and 1988–89) led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front, or JVP).
- 2 Richard Gombrich and GananathObeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); H. L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 3 Jayadeva Uyangoda, "Militarization, Violent State, Violent Society: Sri Lanka," in *Internal Conflicts in South Asia*, eds. Kumar Rupesinghe and KhawarMumtaz (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 118–130.
- 4 Indian Tamils were brought to the island as indentured laborers starting around the 1830s and are therefore tabulated as a separate ethnic community. With those professing Islam considered a distinct group, the census uses 'Muslim' as both ethnic and religious labels when referring to the community.
- 5 See Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, "Census of Population and Housing 2012," 20–1, http://statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/index.php?fileName=Key_E&gp=Activities&tpl=3 (accessed July 29, 2017).
- 6 Indian Tamils were brought to Sri Lanka from South India to work on plantations beginning around the 1830s.
- 7 For a concise account associated with the politics associated with such outbidding, see Neil DeVotta, "Ethnolinguistic Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka," in *Fighting Words: Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Asia*, eds. Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 105–39.
- 8 See Sharada Nayak, *The Raj Agent in Ceylon 1936–40* (New Delhi: Education Resources Center Trust, 2014).
- 9 The Estate Tamils continue to be among the most marginalized in Sri Lanka and many of their local leaders feel the government and estate owners conspire to keep the community socioeconomically disempowered so as to ensure a cheap labor force within the tea industry. Author interviews, July 2013, in Hatton and Nuwara Eliya. See Daniel Bass, *Everyday Ethnicity in Sri Lanka: Up-Country Tamil Identity Politics* (London: Routledge 2013).
- 10 Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 233.

- 11 Quoted in House, *Debates*, November 20, 1958, col. 1747.
- 12 Howard W. Wriggins, "Impediments to Unity in New Nations: The Case of Ceylon," *American Political Science Review* 55, no. 2 (June 1961): 316.
- 13 Tarzie Vittachi, *Emergency '58: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1958), 20.
- 14 See K. N. O. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Ananda Guruge, *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala* (Colombo: Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, 1965).
- 15 Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1960), 268.
- 16 See Neville Jayaweera, "Into the Turbulence of Jaffna," *The Island*, October 5, 2008. <http://www.island.lk/2008/10/05/features2.html> (accessed May 5, 2017).
- 17 S. Sivanayagam, "The Phenomenon of Tamil Militancy," in *Sri Lanka's Crisis and India's Response*, ed. V. Suryanarayan (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1991), 30–47.
- 18 A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, S. J. V. *Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947–1977* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
- 19 Gananath Obeyesekere, "The Origins and Institutionalization of Political Violence," in *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, ed. James Manor (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 153–74; Jagath P. Senaratne, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1977–1990: Riots, Insurrections, Counterinsurgencies, Foreign Intervention* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1997).
- 20 Patricia Hyndman, *Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege* (Nottingham, U.K.: Spokesman, 1988), 26.
- 21 As *The Economist* noted at the time, "[T]he majority Singalese observed that more than half of 'their' new industries were Tamil-owned—and ... burnt down the Tamil factories." See "Ergophobia," *The Economist*, August 13, 1983, 29.
- 22 M. R. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas* (Delhi: Konark, 1994).
- 23 Neil DeVotta, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 6 (November/December 2009): 1021–51.
- 24 Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994), 65.
- 25 *The Economist*, "Truth and Consequences," April 30, 2011, 46.
- 26 Much of this took place during the previous Mahinda Rajapaksa government. Notwithstanding its promises, the current government has failed to prosecute those known to be responsible for certain journalists' murders. See, Bharatha Mallawarachchi, "Sri Lanka Journalists Remember Killed, Abducted Colleagues," *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/sri-lanka-journalists-remember-killed-abducted-colleagues/2018/01/30/cdd28a7a-05ca-11e8-aa61-f3391373867e_story.html?utm_term=.1b0714dd9ea1 (accessed January 31, 2018).
- 27 *Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka*, March 31, 2011, p. iii, at www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/POE_Report_Full.pdf (accessed October 15, 2017).
- 28 Report of the Secretary General's Panel, iv.
- 29 Report of the Secretary General's Panel, 41.
- 30 *The Economist*, "No Closure," March 18, 2017, 39.
- 31 This is especially so when it comes to Tamil women in especially the Northern Province who have endured—and continue to endure—horrendous sexual violence and exploitation among the military and other government agents. See International Crisis Group, *Sri Lanka's Conflict-Affected Women: Dealing with the Legacy of War*, Asia Report No. 289 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2017); Yasmin Sooka, *An Unfinished War: Torture and Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka 2009–2014* (March 2014), http://www.barhumanrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/an_unfinished_war_torture_and_sexual_violence_in_sri_lanka_2009-2014_0-comp_ressed.pdf (accessed July 29, 2017).

- 32 For a useful discussion along these lines see Damien Kingsbury, *Sri Lanka and the Responsibility to Protect: Politics, Ethnicity and Genocide* (New York: Routledge, 2012), chapter 4.
- 33 K. M. De Silva, "The Muslim Minority in a Democratic Polity: The Case of Sri Lanka: Reflections on a Theme," in *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*, ed., M. A. M. Shukri (Beruwala: Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute, 1986), 443–52.
- 34 A. R. M. Imtiyaz and Amjad Mohamed-Saleem, "Muslim in Post-War Sri Lanka: Understanding Sinhala-Buddhist Mobilization against Them," *Asian Ethnicity* 16, no. 2 (2015): 186–202.
- 35 Neil DeVotta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*, Policy Studies 40 (Washington D. C.: East-West Center, 2007), 52.
- 36 M. A. Nuhman, "Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism and Muslim Identity in Sri Lanka: One Hundred Years of Conflict and Coexistence," in *Buddhist Extremists and Muslim Minorities: Religious Conflict in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, ed., John Clifford Holt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30 and 33.
- 37 Nuhman, "Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism," 18–53.
- 38 Quoted in Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 138.
- 39 Quoted in Guruge, *Return to Righteousness*, 540. Anti-Semites have long used Shylock, the unscrupulous moneylender in Shakespeare's drama *The Merchant of Venice*, to denigrate Jews. Dharmapala was doing likewise, despite few Jews having lived in Sri Lanka.
- 40 For instance, just as in India, some Sri Lankan Muslims have been accused of rooting for the Pakistan cricket team when it competed against the island's national side.
- 41 Neil DeVotta and Jason Stone, "Jathika Hela Urumaya and Ethno-Religious Politics in Sri Lanka," *Pacific Affairs* 81 (spring 2008): 31–51; Mahinda Deegalle, "Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka," *Contemporary Buddhism* 5, no. 2 (2004): 83–103.
- 42 Victor Ivan, *Revolt in the Temple: The Buddhist Revival Up to Gangodawila Soma Thera* (Maharagama, Sri Lanka: Ravaya, 2009).
- 43 Author interviews with Dharga Town residents, February 2015. For details regarding ensuing events see Farzana Haniffa, "Stories in the Aftermath of Aluthgama," in *Buddhist Extremists and Muslim Minorities*, 164–93.
- 44 During a focus group meeting in Colombo with Muslim elites, many reiterated that they had, through various Islamic organizations, advised Muslims not to 'pelt a single stone' in reaction to provocations as this could lead to communal mayhem. Author interviews, July 2013.
- 45 The total estimated damages noted here may be exaggerated, because elsewhere the number has been put at 400 million rupees (with slightly different figures also provided for damaged homes and businesses). See Nuhman, "Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism," 51.
- 46 For details pertaining to the election see Neil DeVotta, "A Win for Democracy in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (January 2016): 152–66.
- 47 "'With A Little Political Backing We Can End The Rise Of Muslims,' Gnanasara Who Wishes To Emulate Prabhakaran Declares," *Colombo Telegraph*, September 21, 2016. <http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/with-a-little-political-backing-we-can-end-the-rise-of-muslims-gnanasara-who-wishes-to-emulate-prabhakaran-declares/> (accessed on July 29, 2017).
- 48 Benjamin Schonthal, "Configurations of Buddhist Nationalism in Modern Sri Lanka," in *Buddhist Extremists and Muslim Minorities*, 113.
- 49 These figures are based on interviews with a number of politicians, civil servants, journalists, and academics.

12

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND POST-COLONIAL STATE BUILDING IN SRI LANKA

Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri

With independence in 1948 Sri Lanka was heralded as a model for democracy in the Third World, but within two decades it became the archetypical example of a country wrecked by political violence.¹ The global perception has changed quite dramatically. This chapter investigates how the change in perception took place and how violence is structured and institutionalized in contemporary Sri Lanka. The perceptual shift about Sri Lanka is due to change in the political landscape of the country. There is no denying that the Sri Lankan political landscape has been characterized by endemic violence since the early 1970s. There have been three major armed uprisings between 1971 and 2009. Two major armed uprisings of the rural youth ravaged the Southern parts of the country in 1971 and between 1987 and 1989; and since the late 1970s a separatist armed movement ravaged the North and the East, which also spilled over to other areas.

Besides, a precipitous increase in violence in mainstream politics has been discernible since the 1970s. On the one hand, electoral contests were vitiated with increased violence, while the capacity of the state to perpetrate violence grew significantly and increasing use of state violence against political dissidents became a matter of grave concern, on the other. The Sinhala term *Bheeshanaya* (terror) along with *Dushanaya* (corruption) has acquired a special meaning in the popular political discourse since the 1980s and the slogan *Dushanayata saha Bheeshanayata Erehiva* (against corruption and violence) has become immensely popular among opposition politics for the past three decades. This captures the popular discontent against these two ills in politics and governance in Sri Lanka. These two terms have been particularly important in two epoch making elections in 1994 and 2015. On both occasions, two powerful regimes that dominated the political process for a long time, i.e. seventeen years and ten years, were perceived to have used extreme forms of violence as a *modus operandi* and were resoundingly defeated.

This chapter intends to explain the relationship between violence and the political process in postcolonial Sri Lanka by responding to two questions: what was the role of violence in the polity at the time of independence? What are the ways in which violence increasingly became a major characteristic and pathology of the postcolonial polity of Sri Lanka? I argue that several sources of violence in politics can be identified through a closer look at the postcolonial political history of Sri Lanka. They are: (1) violent behavior in relation to the election process; (2) clashes between ethno-religious communities; (3) excessive use of state violence against dissent; and (4) military confrontations between the state and politically motivated armed insurgents. To comprehend the nature, scope and impact of these dimensions throughout the history of the country, I divide the history of Sri Lanka into four phases: before independence; the first two decades of independence (1948–1971); the third and fourth decades of independence (1971–1989); and the post-1990 era.

Pre-independence polity and violence

Colonial states tend to rely on coercion and use violence against the subjects, often indiscriminately, and these acts of violence tend to be legally sanctioned. Colonial Sri Lanka was no exception. However, we can identify two arenas of political violence in pre-independent Sri Lanka: the state's violent response to inter-community conflicts and protests against state policies; and conflicts between political elites. Two examples of the first strand of violence are the response of the colonial state to Sinhala-Muslim clashes in 1915² and the police action against the workers during the general strike in 1947 when one worker was killed. Clashes between the state and working-class masses who were politically mobilized by the left movement had already started before independence as evident from the 1947 event. These clashes continued well into the post-independence period. The police crackdown on protesters killing several of them, during the famous '1953 Hartal', was an instance that shows how this state violence continued into the post-independence period.³

The other strand of political violence before independence was the conflict between the two groups of political elites. Traditional political elites gained significant political power through long and sustained association with the colonial administrations and faced challenges from the newly emerged political leadership who were able to mobilize various marginalized social groups during elections. The latter group of elites posed challenges to the previously undisputed position of the traditional political elite. These conflicts occasionally became violent, albeit of low intensity. The electoral contest between D.S. Senanayake and Edmond Samarakkody for the Mirigama electorate⁴ in the 1947 parliamentary election is a case in point. Senanayake, the undisputed leader of the traditional political elite, who later went to become the first prime minister of independent Sri Lanka, was elected uncontested to the State Council two consecutive terms prior to 1947. It is reported that he was quite embarrassed because he was challenged by someone who was considered 'an outsider' in this largely rural constituency where the

traditional system of authority was extremely strong. Samarakkody, a leader of the Trotskyite Bolshevik Leninist Party, espoused a political ideology that challenged the very basis of traditional political authority (Perera, 2006).⁵

Although Samarakkody was defeated resoundingly, 10,000 votes to Senanayake's 26,000, there were incidents of violence throughout the campaign. There have been other instances of election violence that were more severe than the Samarakkody–Senanayake battle. For example, during the same election a frontline activist of the Communist Party sustained severe injuries while campaigning for the Communist Party candidate at the Hakmana electorate of the Matara district down South. Incidentally, the victim was the father of Rohana Wijeweera, founder and leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.⁶

First two decades of independence (1948–1968)

Understanding the armed insurgency that ensued in April 1971 warrants a closer examination of the political developments in the previous two decades that created the background for this armed uprising. The April 1971 insurgency by rural youth in the South shocked the entire country and triggered a long spell of bloody confrontation between the state and armed militants, both in the South and the North. This could have been a turning point in the history of political violence in postcolonial Sri Lanka.

The insurgency came against the backdrop of two previous decades' apparently quiet situation, particularly in terms of violence. However, there were clearly visible signs of the disruption of the relatively non-violent political atmosphere. Particularly, tension between the Sinhala and Tamil communities had appeared with the potential of an outburst. A conflict between Sinhala and Tamil political elite had already begun in the last three decades of British rule.⁷ Although a compromise was reached between the political elite of various ethno-religious communities at the time of independence but changed after independence when the Sinhala elite began to dominate the polity in an ethnically divided context.⁸

In response to the Sinhala domination in the post-colonial state building process, Tamil elite began to mobilize the Tamil masses, which effectively brought the two ethnic communities to a face-to-face confrontation. This confrontation began to take a violent form in the latter half of the 1950s when the dominance of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism was consolidated as the ideological underpinning of the postcolonial state and Tamil ethno-nationalism grew as a countervailing force. Parliamentary legislation in 1956, following the landslide victory of the Sinhala ethno-nationalist coalition Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP, *Peoples United Front*), making Sinhala, the language of the majority ethnic group, the only official language created much resentment in the Tamil ethnic community. The tension led to widespread riots between the two ethnic communities in 1958.

As shown by Tarzie Vittachi in his famous account of the 1958 riots, this was the beginning of a series of Sinhala-Tamil riots that culminated in July 1983.⁹ Several factors contributed to the increased tension during this period. The growth of Tamil political resistance on territorially based political demands created

resentments amongst politically conscious members of the Sinhalese community. This demand became stronger after the 1956 MEP victory and the Sinhala-Buddhist political mindset perceived it as a threat to Sinhala-Buddhist interests.¹⁰ There were also other arenas of tension. The state-sponsored new settlement schemes in the North and East which brought people from the Southern parts of the country, as a solution to the high density population in the Southern and Western parts of the country. This move was perceived by the Tamils as a threat to the historical homeland of Tamils. The antagonism towards Tamil demands for a federal system of government also became a source of violent conflict between the two groups.

Election-related violence and confrontations between mass demonstrators and the state machinery, particularly the police, were not rare occurrences. In a well-known incident a Buddhist monk was killed by police during a mass demonstration in 1967. However, these instances did not pose any challenge to the functioning of the formal democratic process. Relatively acceptable levels of decency prevailed in the electoral process and people freely exercised the universal franchise to elect and defeat incumbent political parties at successive elections.

Political violence between 1971 and 1989

The insurgency led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, People's Liberation Front), which spread to many parts of the South for a few weeks from April 5, 1971, was the beginning of a new era of political violence. The JVP emerged as a small clandestine Marxist group in the mid-1960s and became a formidable political force among the rural youth in Southern Sri Lanka.¹¹ Although the insurgency was crushed by the state within a few weeks after thousands were killed and many put behind bars, including the top leadership, the JVP was able to regroup and emerge as a formidable political player after 1977 when a general amnesty was granted to the insurgents by the United National Party government immediately after coming to power.¹² After a short spell in the political mainstream, the JVP was forced into the political underground by the United National Party (UNP) government in 1983 by proscribing it based on an unfounded allegation that the JVP was behind the 1983 July anti-Tamil riots and it was planning a communist type conspiracy to topple the government.¹³

The JVP seemingly felt more at home in the underground than in the political mainstream. Even during its 'democratic phase' from 1977 to 1983, the JVP maintained its clandestine character. The clandestine approach seemed to be more attractive to the rural youth than the appeal of a mainstream party as it was more in line with their anti-systemic emotions.¹⁴ Within three to four years after the proscription, the JVP was able to mobilize rural youth for another armed insurgency. Unlike the 1971 insurgency, which lasted only a few weeks, the insurgency that began in 1987 lasted until the end of 1989, and the impact was much more serious. Casualties were extremely high. No accurate statistics of casualties are available but the popular perception that 60,000 were killed by the counter insurgency offensive signifies the magnitude of the casualties. *Tharunayin hatadahasak gathanaya kireema* (killing 60,000 young men) is still a popular allegation against the UNP leadership. As the insurgents and state

military forces did not engage in face-to-face battles, counter insurgency operations were virtually directed towards the entire society, especially towards rural youth. Conversely, insurgents also unleashed unlimited violence not only against the state machinery, but also against those who opposed their strategy and tactics.¹⁵

Northern insurgency

It is also pertinent to address the drift of Northern youth into a violent political path during the same period. Immediately after the southern insurgency, Northern youth began drifting towards a violent political path. Setting an exact date of the beginning of armed resistance by Tamils is an almost impossible task. Some researchers point to incidents as early as 1956 as the point of departure. Swamy informs us that 'a group of Tamils organized themselves and opened fire at the Sri Lankan army in the eastern district of Batticaloa after the 1956 riots'.¹⁶ Interestingly, a new political thinking, similar to the Sinhala South, was taking shape among Tamil youth in the 1960s. A clandestine group, named *Pulip Padai* (Army of Tigers), had been formed in the early 1960s. The formation of the Tamil Liberation Organization (TLO) in 1969 by a group of frontline youth activists was the turning point. Valupillai Prabhakaran, who later became the best-known leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), was also a member of this group.¹⁷

However, the armed struggle as a dominant form of resistance gained significance in the North in the 1970s. The Southern insurrection of 1971 might have certainly been an inspiration to the Northern youth. Moreover, with the promulgation of the first republic constitution in 1972, by unapologetically ignoring the political demands of Tamils, the Tamil nationalist lobby took a more extremist path. This was certainly a stimulus to the radical youth who had already been prone to violent political ideology. Radicalization of Tamil youth was, arguably, a major factor behind the famous Vadukkodai Resolution, in which the formation of a separate state in the North and the East of Sri Lanka was declared as the goal of Tamil nationalism. The political atmosphere in the North after 1972 was highly volatile and provided ideal ground for radical clandestine groups. Young militants seem to have received moral and other forms of support from the so-called moderate nationalist parties as well. These young militants came to be known as 'Boys' by the senior Tamil leadership. Militant groups made use of this conducive environment to gain strength. There were instances of robberies to collect funds and other violent activities. The highlight of the violent acts perpetrated by militants was the assassination of Mayor Alfred Duraipappah, the Jaffna leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), on July 27, 1975.

At the time of the 1983 anti-Tamil riots more than 30 Tamil militant organizations were in operation, among which Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Peoples Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS) and Eelam People's Revolutionary Front (EPRLF) were the most significant groups.¹⁸

These organizations were supported by the Indian government, especially after 1977 when the newly elected UNP government pursued a foreign policy disliked by India. It is argued that India used these Tamil militant organizations as a cat's paw to teach a lesson to the UNP government. This tactical support by the federal government of India was supplemented by moral support from the Tamil Nadu state, which Tamil militants could utilize as a safe haven.¹⁹ There is general agreement that the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots that ravaged the country was a major turning point in Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. The July 1983 riots were the climax of a trend that began in the late 1950s. The major impact of the riots on Tamil militancy was the immense increase of the recruitment capability of the militant groups. It is generally accepted that before July 1983, militant groups in the North did not do well in terms of recruiting fulltime cadres. The July 1983 riots changed the situation entirely. The Tamil youth that had been chased out of Sinhala-dominated areas joined militant groups *en masse* and were sent to training camps in India and elsewhere to be trained.

The rise of the LTTE was the most consequential event in the development of Tamil militancy. The defining character of the LTTE was its ruthlessness in using extreme violence on any target. The list of targets of the LTE is long and varied and included state leaders, leaders of Tamil political parties and intellectuals, to name a few. The state leaders included the Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, political leaders and public intellectuals such as Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader A. Amirthalingam and public intellectual Rajini Thiranagama. Additionally, non-combatant civilians, particularly living in the Sinhala dominated areas, and so-called border villages were targeted at will. The LTTE became well known for using suicide bombers to attack its target and using child soldiers who were recruited from Tamil families in the North and East by force.

Explaining youth political violence

I will answer two questions to explain the violent behavior of the politically conscious youth. 1) Why and how did the political leadership of the insurgency opt for a violent political strategy? 2) Why was the rural youth passionately and enthusiastically receptive to the violent path as a means to political emancipation? To address the first question, one may argue that advocating violence as a means of capturing political power is not new to the political discourse of the left in Sri Lanka. The intriguing relationship between the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and E.W. Adikaram, Sri Lankan social and cultural intellectual, well-known for his extreme non-violence stance, as narrated by one of his biographers, is an interesting testimony of the way in which violence appeared in the discourse of the left.²⁰

Adikaram was closely associated with the pioneers of the left while they were studying together in London. After returning to Sri Lanka in 1933, he joined with pioneer leftists to agitate for full independence, and also engaged with relief work in malaria-affected rural areas. However, he was reluctant to obtain membership in

the LSSP for the latter's endorsement of violence as a legitimate path to capture state power. Adikaram apparently saw this endorsement of violence by Sri Lankan pioneer leftists as an anomaly, as the latter indeed did not practice violence. Interestingly, Adhikaram's claim resonates the ultra-leftist critic of the old left in late 1960, where the old left was heavily criticized for their failure to capture state power by effectively using violence as a political tool. This discursive context is important in understanding the mushrooming of ultra-left organizations in the second half of the 1960s. These organizations were inspired by the left-oriented armed uprising in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Many young radical leftists in the late 1960s perceived over-reliance on parliamentary democracy as a root cause of the decline of the left. Taking up arms was an attractive option for the left activists who shared this perception.

Why was the radical left appeal for taking up arms attractive to rural youth? Why did they follow the JVP appeal when it was obvious to be suicidal? The answer is to be found in some facets of socio-economic and political developments in the previous few decades.

Roots of youth insurgencies

Here we have to look at not only the Southern insurgency, but also the Northern insurgency. Although the Northern insurgency is connected to the Tamil nationalist resistance, the socio-economic issues of the oppressed youth were the same in both the North and the South. The failure to accommodate the political aspirations of rural youth belonging to the lower social strata was a major flaw of the democratic system in the first two decades since independence. Sri Lanka's democratic system had the ability to accommodate the political aspirations of the rural youth, at least partially. The case of some of the oppressed caste groups is a good example. They were originally mobilized and brought into the political mainstream by the parties of the left. In the 1950s, both the UNP and the SLFP began to address these groups. The case of rural youth was different. Two major parties, as well as the traditional left parties, failed even to identify this group as a socio-economic category. This social group was an outcome of socio-economic and demographic trends, among them the unprecedented increase of population, backwardness in rural agriculture, the desire of rural youth to move out of the rural areas after obtaining relatively high levels of education and the lack of economic opportunities in the urban sector to attract them, to name but a few.

Does this socio-economic reality alone explain the attraction of rural youth towards a violent political path? Colvin R. de Silva, a leading ideologue of the old left, attributed it to the idiosyncrasies of the JVP leadership. His pamphlet with an intriguing title '1971 Rebellion that Aborted the Revolutionary People's Movement' attributed insurgency to the misinterpretation of the classical Marxist idea of revolution by the JVP leadership.²¹ This is not an adequate explanation. Ranajit Guha aptly argued that the risk involved in rebelling against the established order is 'so great that ... [the rebel] could hardly afford to engage in such a project in a state of absent-mindedness'.²² Therefore, it is not sufficient to claim that this whole generation of youth blindly succumbed to the brief and highly simplified political rhetoric of JVP leadership.

I suggest an alternative explanation of how the relationship between the democratic system and rural youth was structured in postcolonial Sri Lanka. There were several significant biases against some marginalized social groups in the postcolonial system of democracy. At the time of independence, political power was concentrated mainly in the hands of the landed aristocracy. The UNP primarily represented the interests of this aristocracy. In 1956 the rural upper middle class, mainly consisting of mid-level land ownership, gained political ascendancy. The ability to dominate the peasantry, especially its poorer sections, which constituted the majority of the population, was vital for both these dominant groups. The landed aristocracy hegemonized its grip over the rural poor through a traditional system of authority, the structure of which was inherited from the precolonial system of political authority. This traditional system of authority was the basis for colonial domination of the peasantry. As the universal franchise broadened political competition in the rural areas, the landed aristocracy could not maintain its monopoly of influence over the peasantry. While the left openly challenged the traditional authority by addressing the poorer sections of the peasantry, the rural upper middle class that had more intimate relationships with the rural poor emerged as a powerful political force. The upper middle class had the ability to forge a new hegemonic relationship with the rural poor, especially through the ideological mediation of the Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism.

Despite the Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalist rhetoric and the election slogan of 'Five Great Forces', namely *Sangha-Weda-Guru-Govi-Kamkaru* (Buddhist monks, indigenous physicians, school teachers, farmers and workers), a unity between these two classes the UNP could not be established; conflict of interests between the rural upper middle class and the rural poor did not completely disappear.²³

The Paddy Land Act of 1958, originally intended to benefit the poor tenant farmers, is an instance where the conflicting interests became evident. The Act failed to meet its objective because of pressure from the land-owning class within the government.²⁴ In general, the land policies by the SLFP governments from 1956 to 1977 were favorable to the rural upper middle class. The 1971 JVP insurgency was an instance where the conflicting interests between these two rural social classes became evident. The support of the rural upper middle class was vital for the government to suppress the insurgency. The majority of insurgents belonged to the families of rural poor.²⁵ The politically dominant rural upper middle class looked down upon the insurgents with a sense of superiority and perceived them as a potential threat to its dominance in the rural areas.²⁶ Though the majority of the youth attractive to the radical appeal of the JVP were the children of the rural poor, their social dreams were fundamentally different from those of their parents. While their parents were firmly entrenched in traditional peasant agriculture, the children who had benefited from free education developed a dream of their future life outside the world of the traditional peasant.

The abject poverty and the pressure of a growing population was so severe that the ambitious youth saw no future in the socio-political reality around them. In other words, rural society at the end of the 1960s was a time bomb ticking very fast. There is extensive literature that shows the gravity of this 'youth unrest'.

Perhaps nowhere is it better documented than in the 'Report of the Presidential Commission on Youth, 1990', compiled immediately after the 1987–89 insurgency.²⁷ The desperate wish of rural youth with some degree of education was to leave the village and find a career in the city. The only possible way was to find a state sector job, as that was by far the main source of jobs outside the peasant agriculture and plantation sector. The ability to absorb more of the state sector was limited and therefore youth unemployment was growing exponentially. Various attractive promises and the rhetoric of postcolonial political leadership was not capable of producing tangible results. Added to this dire situation was the inability of traditional political leadership, both on the right and the left, to address their concerns and attract them to their fold. It is in this context that the political appeal of the JVP became attractive to rural youth.

1977–1989: a new synthesis between politics and violence

Looking at political violence in postcolonial Sri Lanka, it is possible to describe the period between 1977 and 1989 as a unique era. It was marked by the culmination of three postcolonial trends that threatened the democratic system, namely, transformation of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict into violent forms, the second youth insurgency in the South with higher intensity and the unprecedented growth of the coercive capacity of the state enabling it to unleash extreme forms of state-sponsored violence against the citizens. This period could be understood as an interregnum between the pre-1977 period in which the state-society relationships were dominated by the two-party equilibrium system and the post-1989 period in which the two-party equilibrium system was effectively replaced with the rise of non-party political players. Between 1956 and 1977 the competition between the two parties provided a semblance of a democratic relationship between the state and the citizens. The situation changed in 1977 when the SLFP suffered a heavy blow with a drastic decline of its vote base. In the aftermath of defeat, SLFP underwent a serious internal crisis. The consequence of the absence of a strong opposition was strongly felt as the new regime exercised state power and an authoritarian rule ensued.²⁸

The UNP regime behaved as if it has taken a firm decision that no room ought to be given to any dissent. Elections were blatantly rigged. Groups of thugs were systematically deployed to attack protests, in addition to using unbridled police power. Legal and other extra-legal measures were employed to split the opposition forces. The entire election process was manipulated to ensure that the five-sixth majority garnered in the 1977 election was retained. Radhika Coomaraswamy described this as 'J.R. mantra', named after President J.R. Jayewardene. The policy underscored political stability as a precondition for economic growth at the expense of democracy and human rights.²⁹ This mindset and policy justified indiscriminate use of violence against any dissent. The regime put this thinking into practice on several fronts. First, measures were taken to weaken the SLFP, the main opposition. It went to the extent of depriving the civic rights of the defeated Prime

Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike through a controversial amendment to the constitution.³⁰ This was followed by a series of carefully maneuvered measures to create internal divisions within the SLFP, with considerable success. This led to the break-up of the SLFP in 1984.

Second, a tough stand was taken against Tamil resistance. Emergency regulations were imposed, and new legislation was passed. The new legislation included the draconian Prevention of Terrorism (Special Provisions) Act of 1979 and the 6th amendment to the Constitution. The latter made taking an oath of allegiance to the unitary character of the state mandatory. Members of the Tamil United Liberation Front were forced out of the parliament for its defiance. Moreover, serious damages were inflicted on the democratic process in the North by way of state-sponsored violence. This practice was mostly under the pretext of eradicating terrorist activities and bringing back normalcy. This era formally began in 1979 when President Jayewardene dispatched to North Brigadier Tissa Weeratunga, his nephew, to eradicate the threat of terrorism before the end of the year. Although the task was not completed by the end of the year, Weeratunga was followed by a group of powerful Southern politicians and their thugs on the eve of the District Development Council elections held in July 1981. The highlight of the violence perpetrated by state-sponsored gangs was the burning down of the Jaffna public library, which became the symbol of state-sponsored violence in the North.³¹

Third, the regime consistently maintained a policy of zero tolerance towards dissent in the South. In the first few years following the election victory, the JVP had been given a relatively free hand to engage in public political work, as a tactical move, because the SLFP seemed to be JVP's main enemy at the time.³² This was only a short-term phenomenon, and the tolerance towards the JVP soon changed, as manifested in the proscription of the JVP in the aftermath of July 1983 anti-Tamil riots. The intolerance of dissent was aggressively exercised in connection with trade union actions. Although voter attraction to the traditional left parties had diminished, they continued to have a fairly significant control over the trade union sector. Left parties were capable of mobilizing, especially their public-sector unions, to cripple the state machinery. The regime considered this as a serious threat, as the 'industrial peace' was considered to be a *sine qua non* for the expected speedy economic growth. Its strategy for economic growth was heavily dependent on the ability to attract foreign capital for which the availability of cheap labor and collective bargaining was vital. The newly created so-called Free Trade Zones had been designed to fulfil this need. In that context, taming organized labor was, perhaps, more important than taming democratic opposition.

President Jayewardene, veteran politician, was not unaware that changing the ruling party at every election was a trend of Sri Lanka politics in recent history. He was decidedly intent on altering this trend and to remain in power until his retirement from politics at a time of his choosing. His strategy to manipulate the electoral process became self-evident when he allegedly wanted to 'roll up the electoral map of Sri Lanka for another 10 years' in his speech on October 3, 1982.³³ What he meant was certainly to free the country from the political uncertainty that resulted from frequent

elections. He used both constitutional and other measures to this end. The infamous referendum of 1982 to postpone the general election due in 1983 was a clear example. The constitution was amended, thanks to the large majority in the parliament. Moreover, the result of the referendum was apparently predetermined and blatant malpractices, including widespread vote rigging, were committed. In the popular perception, the 1982 referendum was the biggest black mark on the history of popular elections in Sri Lanka.³⁴

The 'Mahara' by-election of 1982 is also a case that illustrates such malpractice and extra-constitutional measures of the ruling party. A close competition between the UNP candidate and the SLFP candidate was predicted but the election campaign was marred by violence against the latter. Mahara was a traditional SLFP stronghold and the popularity of the opposition candidate, Vijaya Kumaratunga, the popular film star, added more importance to the contest.³⁵ He narrowly escaped several assassination attempts during the election campaign and one of his close supporters was killed in one such shooting incident. When the vote was first counted, Kumaratunga had won by a small margin. But after several recounts the UNP candidate had won by 45 votes. It is reported that electricity of the counting center went off at the time of the last recount. The referendum and Mahara by-election shows how elections were conducted in this era and how the regime acted when it felt the smell of the slightest threat to its grip over the people's support.³⁶

Extremely violent reaction against trade union activities mark the period of the Jayewardene regime. The crackdown on the July 1980 general strike is the best example in this regard.³⁷ The strike challenged not only the neo-liberal policy package of the regime, but also the regime's attempt to monopolize the political process by way of restricting avenues for any opposition. The government responded with unprecedented heavy-handed measures. Industrial disputes were frequent phenomena in postcolonial Sri Lanka, and also there were instances of violent confrontation between unionized workers and police. The hostile approach towards the trade union actions was frequent and unfortunately the left-oriented United Front coalition government was also hostile to union actions at times. Nevertheless, the anti-trade union approach of the Jayewardene regime was unique. As previously mentioned, it had clearly defined macro-economic justification for such an approach (political stability for speedy economic growth). Moreover, the intensity by which this approach was executed is also significant. There were organized groups of thugs who carried out their 'duties' mostly under the aegis of powerful politicians of the UNP. These groups became infamous among the public and popularly labeled as *Baical Chain Hamudawa* (Bicycle Chain Gang)³⁸ and *Thug Sansthava* (The Cooperation of Thugs).³⁹ A worker was killed in July 1979 at Colombo Fort when these pro-government vigilantes attacked a public demonstration of workers.

This systematic thuggery was directed not only against trade union protests, but also any form of public protest. The best-known instance of this mode of thug attack on public dissent was the incident where two prominent public figures, the famous Buddhist monk, Reverend Maduluwawe Sobhitha and the well-known public intellectual Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra, were physically assaulted at

a public meeting in July 1982. The JVP-led insurgency that began after the controversial July 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord was the litmus test for this mode of state-sponsored violence. This state-sponsored aggression boomeranged when the JVP also resorted to an extreme form of violence. Benefiting from the virtual absence of democratic space for public dissent, the JVP used violence to force the public to disobey the authority of the state.

Bheeshana Kale (the Era of Terror), the term with which the period of the insurgency of 1987–89 was popularly known, captures the reality of this phase of the history of political violence in postcolonial Sri Lanka.⁴⁰ The violence of the JVP and the counter-insurgency violence of the state as well as many other anti-JVP elements, particularly of the non-JVP left who were also targets of the JVP violence, were extremely brutal and unprecedented. The insurgency was indeed suppressed at a high price. The entire JVP top leadership, with one exception,⁴¹ was decimated. JVP was also responsible for a large number of assassinations including very high-profile targets, such as leading politicians, activists of left wing groups, artists, people working in the media and civilians who disobeyed its instructions and criminals.

There was a sense of public approval for the JVP violence during the insurgency. This approval could be linked to the public anger towards state-sponsored violence in the 1980s. The public hailed the JVP violence when it was directed towards individuals with criminal records who had close connections with the regime's political leadership. The killing of Gonavala Sunil, who earned notoriety for his criminal record is case in point.⁴² He was very close to the UNP top leadership, and once received a presidential pardon just before the 1982 violence-ridden referendum while serving a prison sentence. Ironically, he was appointed by the government as an 'All-Island Justice of Peace'. He was also known as a leading figure in organized gangs that unleashed violence on numerous occasions on the regime's behalf, including the killing of Tamil militant suspects in the Colombo remand prison during the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots.

The cycle of violence affected the political fabric immensely. While it inflicted heavy damage on the JVP, it also damaged the political legitimacy of the UNP regime. Although President Ranasinghe Premadasa, elected in 1988 in an election marred by extensive violence and boycotted by the JVP, made serious efforts to regain legitimacy through various pro-people measures, the damage was significant. It became evident that the JVP boycotted the presidential election as a tactical move to extend indirect support to Premadasa.⁴³ The goal was to defeat the opposition candidate Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Her election platform was similar to that of the rhetoric and issues of the JVP's rationale for insurgency. It appears that the JVP felt that the victory of the opposition candidate might have delegitimized the insurgency. Therefore, the JVP strategic thinking seems to have been a victory of a weaker candidate vis-à-vis a popular ideology that it can confront easily after the election.

The tactic, however, did not work. Premadasa succeeded in mobilizing the state machinery to suppress the insurgency. Nevertheless, the UNP could not survive the post-insurgency political revival in the South. Not only did Premadasa lose his

life to a suicide bomb attack on May 1993, allegedly carried out by the LTTE, but also the UNP lost both parliamentary and presidential elections in 1994 to the newly formed Peoples' Alliance (PA) led by Chandrika Kumaratunga. Kumaratunga had by then become the central figure of the SLFP. It is pertinent to look at the new political dynamics after the end of the JVP insurgency.

New dynamics after 1990

The relationship between politics and violence since 1990 can be broadly characterized as the presence of two contradictory yet mutually complementary trends. Two interrelated dual movements constituted these two trends. The first trend was the emergence of a new discourse demanding the broadening of the democratic space and the second trend is marked with the rise of a new wave of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist ideology.⁴⁴ As for the first trend, there was a continuity of the post-1977 pattern of the relationship between politics and violence, albeit with low intensity. But importantly, a new political discourse emerged which underscored the need for a deepening of the democratic system, with specific attention to fundamental rights, freedom of expression, transitional justice for the victims of the insurgency and, to a certain extent, the need to amicably address the political demands of Tamil North. On the other hand, the second trend is marked by violence being more explicitly advocated and a demand for coercive actions on the part of the state. As the Tamil insurgency gained strength in the North and was becoming more violent, a new Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist upsurge in the South was taking place demanding a comprehensive military solution to the 'Northern Question'.

These two dialectical movements, in operation from 1990 to 2004, created a new structure of antagonism in the political arena. This ultimately led to the formation of the Mahinda Rajapaksha regime in 2005, which could be seen as a victory for the 'second movement'. Although Rajapaksha won the 2005 presidential election over his opponent Ranil Wickramasinghe with only a small margin, he was enormously successful in winning the support of the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency to remain in power until January 8, 2015. The relationship between politics and violence reached a new stage under the Rajapaksha regime, as exacting violence by the state received unprecedented popular support. The source of popular support was the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist lobby that gained momentum during the short-lived period of dual power between President Kumaratunga and his opponent Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. The Ceasefire Agreement of 2002 (CFA) signed between the LTTE leader and Wickramasinghe hurt the ethno-nationalist feelings of the Sinhala-Buddhist community.⁴⁵ President Kumaratunga, despite her preference for a political settlement between the Tamil North and the Sinhala South, could not withstand the pressure of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist lobby to dissolve the parliament as a backlash to the CFA and called for an early election. A split had occurred between Kumaratunga and Wickramasinghe, as the latter had ignored the former when he signed the CFA. This split helped Mahinda Rajapaksha to rally the extreme nationalist forces around him.

Both LTTE's rigid approach towards a negotiated settlement on the Tamil question and a Sinhala-Buddhist hardline stance against such a settlement facilitated the end of the peace initiative and the resumption of the military offensive with unprecedented ferocity. This was an enormously popular move in the Sinhala-Buddhist South and the violent capacity of the state was unleashed not only against the LTTE, but against any dissenting voice. Dissenting voices were portrayed as unpatriotic, stealthy support of the enemy and therefore any violence against those voices was claimed to be justified. Parallel to the increase of the violent capacity of the state during the Rajapaksha regime, various Buddhist extremist organizations, inciting hatred against ethnic and religious minorities, mushroomed. Most of these organizations were directly or indirectly supported by the state and the political leadership of the Rajapaksha camp.⁴⁶ The nature of political violence under the Rajapaksha rule is best understood through an examination of the nature of the political transformation since the fall of the UNP regime in 1994. The election victory of the People's Alliance (PA) under the leadership of Chandrika Kumaratunga was heavily dependent on the mobilization of the public outcry against the UNP's style of governance since 1977. Kumaratunga's victory sparked hope for a non-military solution to the Northern question, as she garnered overwhelming support during the presidential election campaign in the North.

The fundamental problem with the PA government was, however, that its election success was dependent not on a clearly formulated and pragmatic policy framework to be implemented after gaining power, but entirely on the public negation of the UNP style of governance and the popular critical discourse generated as a result of the negation of the UNP. It was, to a greater extent, not a vote for the PA but against the UNP. The performance of the PA government could be assessed in terms of 'three failures', namely, 1) the economic promise of 'Open economy with Human face'; 2) the democratization of the political process, and 3) a solution to the Northern question. None of these slogans produced tangible results. These three failures are directly relevant to the discussion at hand: the drift of the Sri Lankan polity towards a more authoritarian style of governance with the help of extreme Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism particularly promoting state sponsored political violence with popular support.

As discussed thus far, political violence in Sri Lanka is directly linked with three broader structural issues: 1) socio-economic injustice faced by lower social strata, especially the rural poor, 2) discontent with the democratic process, which included the exclusion of various groups from the mainstream political process and advocating anti-democratic modes of governance mostly resulting in producing authoritarian regimes, and 3) the Northern question that was an outcome of the exclusion of Tamils in the North and the East from the postcolonial state-building project, as result of which the state effectively, became a Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalist political entity. Although the People's Alliance of 1994 promised to reverse the inadequacies, it failed to deliver. The euphoria created by the PA's victory took no time to disappear. Certain long-term trends that enabled the resilience of political violence proved to be stronger than the short-term popular desire for a democratic political path. The most

disturbing trend was returning to the authoritarian path, though in a relatively less intensive form compared to the 1980s. The best indicator of the rise of authoritarianism in the Kumaratunga regime was the rift between the government and the various non-party lobbying groups that were actively involved in the 1994 election campaign for the PA. Most of these groups by the end of the 1990s had begun to work closely with the UNP on a similar platform.

There are several landmark moments of the return of authoritarianism under the PA regime. The election for the North-Western Provincial Council in 1999, considered as one of the most violent elections in the history of Sri Lanka, is one of these landmark moments. It was almost a replication of the 1982 referendum and Mahara by-election. Additionally, a significant number of incidents of physical attacks on political opponents, including killings, took place. Top leadership of PA was blamed for these incidents. There were allegations of close associations between the political leadership of the regime and the criminal underworld. An officer of the presidential division, Amarasinghe Dhananjaya Perera better known as Baddagana Sanjewa, was claimed to be a criminal underworld leader. He was blamed for many attacks on political opponents of the PA.⁴⁷ A much celebrated peace initiative between the government and the LTTE did not last long. It effectively ended when the LTTE sank two Sri Lanka naval boats in April 1995. Consequently, the government launched a military campaign to capture the Jaffna peninsula from the LTTE, which succeeded in December 1995. Although the government attempted to keep its promise for a peaceful solution alive through presenting a package of constitutional reform and initiating a public campaign in the South in support of the package, it not only failed in that but also created a backlash engendering a platform for the resurgence of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism.⁴⁸ This new Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism was further strengthened by resisting the MOU signed between the LTTE and Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe in 2002.

Of course, there was one development in the post 1990 economic realm that had a major bearing on the violent political behavior of rural youth who were previously politically mobilized by the JVP. As the economy had been expanding at a relatively rapid pace since 1977, some avenues were created to absorb the rural youth, which was a major factor in the de-radicalization of the JVP and the abandonment of the radical political strategy that led to two armed insurgencies. In the post 1990 period, the recruitment capability of the JVP amongst the rural youth was greatly diminished and evolved into a much more de-radicalized mainstream party with a semi-urban middle class social base.⁴⁹

The rise and the fall of the Rajapaksha regime and the failure of democratic reforms

The government of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), under the leadership of Mahinda Rajapaksha, the Prime Minister after the April 2004 parliamentary election and the president of the September 2005 presidential election, became consolidated over the course of a few years. Although the presidential election was a closely contested battle between Rajapaksha and

Ranil Wickramasinghe, the former was a more popular candidate among the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency. Wickramasinghe suffered a heavy blow because of the LTTE's election boycott, akin to the JVP tactic of the 1988 presidential election. The LTTE leadership appears to have thought that the continuation of the peace process that was underway was detrimental to its military agenda. The peace process received full backing from the major international players and the LTTE seems to have thought that it was entangled in a 'peace trap'. In such a situation, the latter might have thought that Rajapaksha would be a better choice because it is unlikely that a Rajapaksha government, with backing from Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, would be as attractive as a Wickramasinghe government to the 'international community'. Therefore, the LTTE felt that the victory for Rajapaksha would be a smart way out of the 'peace trap', without antagonizing the 'International Community', whose support was indispensable. This calculation of the LTTE proved to be wrong, as the Rajapaksha government opted for a comprehensive military offensive with a high degree of ruthlessness to match the LTTE brutality. The counter offensive was led by Mahinda Rajapaksha's younger brother, ex-military officer Gotabhaya Rajapaksha and the army chief Sarath Fonseka, who later became the unsuccessful opponent of Rajapaksha in the presidential election of 2010.

The military campaign ended with complete occupation of the LTTE held territory in the North and the killing of the LTTE leader; it also had caused multifaceted impacts on the political fabric of Sri Lanka. The overwhelming support of the government's military campaign by the Sinhalese population and the festive celebration in the South of the military victory was entirely different from the North, which experienced unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Although the defeat of the LTTE gave a sense of relief to the people, it was both a human tragedy and defeat to the self-dignity as an ethnic group. The end of the war, therefore, addressed none of the sources of conflict, apart from ending the physical damage to the people and their property for the previous 30 years. Moreover, the political division between the South and North seemed to be deepening even after the end of the war. Southern political discourse continued to perceive Northern politics as a threat to the 'sovereignty' of the country. This has become a ruling ideology of the South and that ideology was fostered with the help of the state to mobilize public support for the war. This ideology was essential for the governing elite to consolidate its grip on the Southern society in the post-war era. To make this ideology more effective, the presence of a powerful enemy had to be projected.

An important aspect of post-war Sri Lanka was the continued increase of the violent capacity of the state and the use of it against public dissent. The ruling mentality as well as the public support that the governing elite continued to enjoy justified this violent behavior for the time being, because the political dissent was attempted to be linked to the broader agenda of a 'global separatist threat' against the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. New frontiers in political behavior with the ability to generate violent capabilities were opened up with the rise of religious extremism in the post-war era. Various organizations that mushroomed in the context of the

resurgence of Sinhala-Buddhist ethno-nationalism in the late 1990s, were occupying this new space filled with the capacity for violence. Anti-Muslim riots in July 2014 that emerged in the township Alutgama of the Kalutara district highlighted the impact that these organizations had made. These organizations maintained highly problematic relationships with the political leadership of the government. There was a general perception that the best known of these organizations, Bodu Bala Sena, was supported by Gotabhaya Rajapaksha, secretary to the Ministry of Defense (Dewasiri, 2016).⁵⁰ Although the Rajapaksha loyalist continued to challenge that allegation, the impunity that these organizations enjoyed, even when they violated the law in broad daylight, was enormous. Serious fear psychosis was created among religious minorities, including Muslims, various Christian denominations and also among certain unorthodox Buddhist groups, as these groups were frequently subjected to the violent acts of these organizations.

Another important trend was the way in which the violent capacity of the state was made, ostensibly, to fight the criminal underworld. The boundary between the space of political dissent and the criminal underworld was purposely blurred by the discourse of the regime. Certain extra-judicial measures such as kidnapping individuals, which came to be known as 'white-vanning' (kidnapping individuals by groups linked to the security establishment by using white vans), were indirectly justified as an acceptable excess. The blurring of the boundary between the realm of the legally sanctioned violence and that of the extra-judicial violence became extremely significant. The breakdown of 'normal' functioning of law and order became clear as rival groups within the political camp of the government began to kill each other in broad daylight. One of these incidents that drew attention was the clash between Bharatha Lakshman Premachandra and Duminda Silva, two close associates of Rajapaksha. In an attack Premachandra was killed and Silva was injured. Later, Silva was convicted and sentenced to death for the death of Premachandra. This culture of violence indeed became one of the defining themes of the presidential campaign of the common opposition candidate on the January 8, 2015 presidential election, in which the common opposition candidate, Maithreepala Sirisena won over his rival Mahinda Rajapaksha.

Conclusion

As discussed in this chapter, the relationship between violence and the political process in postcolonial Sri Lanka is extremely complicated. A vibrant democratic system has continued to flourish amidst several armed insurgencies, including a bloody 30-year civil war. A highly active voting population has continuously shown that they are capable of electing and defeating incumbents under extremely trying circumstances. At the same time, violence has played its role. Its trajectory has been extremely complex. Violence has functioned on many occasions, as a mediatory agency in the encounters between those who were *in* the democratic process and those who remain *outside*. Furthermore, conflicts of interests among various fractions of the 'democratic mainstream' have been mediated through violence of multiple forms.

The continued growth of the violent capability of the state vis-à-vis the society is a notable phenomenon. Physical capacities of the state military establishment, such as military hardware, institutions and human resources reached an alarmingly high level as a result of confronting two Southern insurgencies and the protracted civil war in the North. Consequently, the political and ideological sanction for the increasing use of violence by the state has evolved into a critical level where violence is seen as the most effective agency in solving various state-society confrontations. While violence is seen as the obvious choice for countering armed insurgencies, it is also seen as an effective means to quell public demonstrations, to mediate intergroup conflicts and to conduct successful election campaigns. Moreover, constituencies that are numerically bigger and more politically influential, such as the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency, show a degree of complacency towards the growth of political violence. While there have been countervailing forces that emerged regularly and achieved some occasional political victories, the relationship between violence and politics seems to be linked to various deeply-rooted institutionalized and long-term practices.

Notes

- 1 Researchers have identified political violence as the central problem in postcolonial Sri Lanka; see the “research problem” in S.J. Tambiah’s controversial work *Buddhism Betrayed?* He formulated his question as follows: “If Buddhism preaches nonviolence, why is there so much political violence in Sri Lanka today?” See, S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.
- 2 P.V.J. Jayasekera, “Temperance and Nationalism in Sri Lanka,” *Kalyani, Journal of Humanities and Social Science of the University of Kelaniya* Vol. III (1984) and Vol. IV (1985).
- 3 1953 Hartal was a widespread protest campaign led by the left wing political parties and their workers’ unions against the government’s measure to increase the price of rice. For detail see Wesley S. Muthiah, and Sidney Wanasinghe, Sidney, *We Were Making History: Saga of the Hartal of August 1953*, (Colombo: A Young Socialist Publication, 2002).
- 4 Mirigama is a seat of the State Council, the legislative body that was established in 1931.
- 5 T. Perera, *Revolutionary trails, Edmund Samarakody: A Political Profile* (Colombo: Social Scientists’ Association, 2006).
- 6 A.C. Alles, *The J.V.P. 1969–1989* (Colombo: Lake House Investments Ltd., 1990), 2.
- 7 Nira Wickramasinghe, *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Vicas Publishing House pvt Ltd, 1995).
- 8 K.M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies, Sri Lanka 1880–1985* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986).
- 9 Tarzie Vittachi, *Emergency '58: The story of the Ceylon race riots* (Author Publication, 1958).
- 10 For detail about the Sinhala-Buddhist political mindset, see Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri “History” after the War: *Historical Consciousness in the Collective Sinhala-Buddhist Psyche in Post-War Sri Lanka* (Colombo: ICES, 2013).
- 11 Literature on the insurgency and the JVP abound; for excellent expositions see: Alles, JVP 1969–1989; Gananath Obeyesekera, “Some Comments on the Social Backgrounds of the April 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lanka (Ceylon).” *Journal of Asian Studies* 33(3): 367–84; Mick Moore, “Thoroughly Modern Revolutionaries: The JVP in Sri Lanka” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 27, No. 3 (July, 1993): 593–642.
- 12 Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, “Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and Radical Politics in Contemporary Sri Lanka” in eds. Amita Shastri, and Jayadeva Uyangoda, *Political Parties in Sri Lanka, Changes and Continuity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

- 13 For an account of this episode of the JVP's history see Michael Colin Cooke, *Rebellion, Repression and the Struggle for Justice in Sri Lanka: The Lionel Bopage Story* (Colombo: Agahas Publishers, 2011).
- 14 Dewasiri, "Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and Radical Politics."
- 15 The list of fatal casualties of the JVP violence is fairly a long one. Initially the non-state targets were those who belonging to non-JVP left parties and groups. They were generally labelled as traitors of the country.
- 16 M.R. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1994), 23.
- 17 Swamy, *Tigers of Sri Lanka*, 25.
- 18 See Rajan Hoole, et al., *Broken Palmyra* (California: Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1990) for detail about the state of Tamil militant organization during this period, 71–98.
- 19 Swamy, *Tigers of Sri Lanka*, 93–114; Also Hoole, et.al, *Broken Palmyra*.
- 20 Denagama Siriwardana, *Ahimsa Upatha* (Colombo: S.Godage Publishers, 1995), 36–39.
- 21 Colvin R. de Silva, *Viplaveeya Janatha Vyaparaya Kuruvalkala 71 kerella* (Colombo: Young Socialist Publication).
- 22 Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency" in *Subaltern Studies II*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1.
- 23 For 1956 election, see I.D.S. Weerawardana, *Ceylone General Election 1956* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Co. LTD, 1960).
- 24 N. Shanmugaratnam, (1980) "Emerging Agrarian Trends and some Reflections on the Agrarian Reforms in Sri Lanka," in *Social Science Review, Journal of Social Scientists Association of Sri Lanka*, No. 2, (1980), 66.
- 25 See Gananath Obeyesekere, "Some Comments on the Social Backgrounds of the April 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)," *Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 3 (1974): 367–84, for the social composition of the 1971 insurgents.
- 26 Jayadeva Uyangoda, a well-known academic and a leader of the 1971 insurgency, recalled how he was ridiculed by the villagers belonging to the rural upper middle class, when he returned from the jail after insurgents were given a common amnesty. The Sinhala movie "*Smarana Samapthi*" by Satyajith Maitipe features the conflictual relationship between these two rural social classes during a youth insurgency (Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, "Smarana Samapthi saha Lankave Prajathanthravadaye Asahanayan," *Smarana Samapthi and Discontents of Sri Lanka's Democracy*, in *Smarana Samapthi Sinama Pappochcharana –A Collection of Reviews of the Film Smarana Samapthi* (Colombo: Swadeena Sinama Ekathuwa, 2017). Moreover, this conflict is frequently featured in literary work of Gunadasa Amarasekera, a well-known Sinhala writer. See for example his short story "Vartha Satahan" in the collection titled *Katha Paha* (Five Stories) (Gunadasa Amarasekera, *Katha Paha* (Five stories) Boralesgamuwa: Visidunu Publishers 1975 & 2008).
- 27 S.T. Hettige and Markus Meyer, *Sri Lankan Youth: Challenges and Responses* (Colombo: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2002).
- 28 The way in which the UNP regime exercised its authoritarian rule has been well documented in Rajan Hoole, *Sri Lanka, the Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence and Murder* (Colombo: University Teachers for Human Rights –Jaffna, 2001).
- 29 Radhika Coomaraswamy, Radhika, 2014, <http://ices.lk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PRIORITIES-FOR-THE-NEXT-PRESIDENT.pdf> (accessed January 13, 2018).
- 30 Hoole, "Arrogance of Power," 90.
- 31 For a comprehensive documentation of this period in the Tamil North, see Hoole, et al, *Broken Palmyra*, 19–70.
- 32 Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, "Mainstreaming Radical Politics in Sri Lanka: The case of post-1977 JVP," *PCD Journal: Journal of Power Conflict, and Democracy in South and South East Asia II*, no.1 2010, PCD Press, Department of Politics and Government- Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gajah Mada, (2010): 69–94, and Dewasiri, "Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and Radical Politics."
- 33 K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins, *J.R. Jayawardene of Sri Lanka*, (London: Leo Cooper/ Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 1994), 532. However, De Silva and Wriggins claim it as a misreporting of a speech where the expression was used and blame it on the

- journalist. Whether the allegation of misreporting is correct or not, subsequent events demonstrate the government's action consistent with such claim.
- 34 Even his biographers, K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins, who make clear effort to salvage him from severe criticism leveled against him by his opponents, admits "that there was some validity in these accusations" about the 1982 referendum (De Silva & Wriggins, *J.R. Jayawardene of Sri Lanka*, 548.)
 - 35 Vijaya Kumaratunga (1945–1988) was the spouse of the former President Chandrika Kumaratunga. He unsuccessfully contested for a seat from Gampala district in 1977. In the early 1980s, he became the icon of the opposition politics. He was at the receiving end of wrath of the ruling UNP regime. He was assassinated allegedly by the JVP's proxy Patriotic Peoples Movement in February 1988.
 - 36 The author has first hand experience as he was physically present in the area during the election. For more about the controversy related to the Mahara by-election, see Mudliyar, "Courts and Lanka's election culture," *Sunday Times*, January 24, 1999, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/990124/mudli.html> (accessed January 13, 2018).
 - 37 For more about the 1980 general strike, see, Laksiri Fernando, "The State and Class Struggle in Sri Lanka: The General Strike of July 1980," in *Labour, Capital and Society / Travail, capital et société* 16, No. 2 (November 1983/novembre 1983): 204–225.
 - 38 This label is because these gangs mostly used bicycle chains to assault public protesters.
 - 39 The term *Thug Sansthavamay* carries dual meanings. On one hand it may refer to the fact that these thugs were mostly newly recruited employees of the public Cooperations (*Rajya Sanstha*). This may also refer to the fact that they were highly organized and systematic.
 - 40 This period has been well documented. Although Chandraprema's account (C.A. Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka, the years of terror: The JVP insurrection, 1987–1989*, Colombo: Lake House Bookshop, 1991) is openly against the JVP, it provides a good overview of the period. See also Rohan Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka, A Lost Revolution?: The Inside Story of the JVP* (Colombo: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 1990).
 - 41 Somawansa Amarasinghe who survived the carnage managed to flee the country and received political asylum in Europe. He became the leader of the JVP later and returned to Sri Lanka after the fall of the UNP government in 1994.
 - 42 For an account of the criminal records of "Gonavala Sunil and his connections with the UNP regime," see, Rajan Hoole, *Sri Lanka, the arrogance of power*, 164–165.
 - 43 Dewasiri, "Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and Radical Politics in Contemporary Sri Lanka," 205–206.
 - 44 Dewasiri, *New Buddhist Extremism*, 7–11.
 - 45 The CFA 2002 was fundamentally aimed at bringing an end to escalating military confrontation between the Sri Lanka Lankan state and the LTTE. It was signed under the facilitation of the Norwegian government, which led the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) that monitored the operation of the CFA. It failed to meet its goal and the Sri Lanka Lankan government decided to withdraw from the CFA claiming that the LTTE continues to violate it in 2006. For the CFA document and various perspective on it, see S.I. Keethaponcalan and Ravi Jayawardana (eds.), *Sri Lanka: Perspectives on the Ceasefire Agreement of 2002* (Colombo: South Asia Peace Institute, 2009).
 - 46 For detail on the rise of these organizations see Dewasiri *New Buddhist Extremism*.
 - 47 "Unpunished Crimes of the Presidential Security Division (PSD)," <https://rsf.org/en/reports/unpunished-crimes-presidential-security-division-psd> (accessed March 11, 2018).
 - 48 Dewasiri, *History after War*; and Dewasiri, *New Buddhist Extremism*.
 - 49 Dewasiri, "Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and Radical Politics."
 - 50 Dewasiri, *New Buddhist Extremism*.

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